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# Family and school influences on disordered adolescent behavior: a study of young adolescents in trouble in school.

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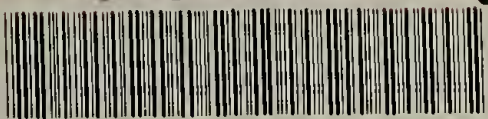
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FAMILY AND SCHOOL INTERACTIVE INFLUENCES  
ON DISORDERED ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR:  
A STUDY OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS IN TROUBLE IN SCHOOL

A Thesis Presented

By

PATRICIA OWENS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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300

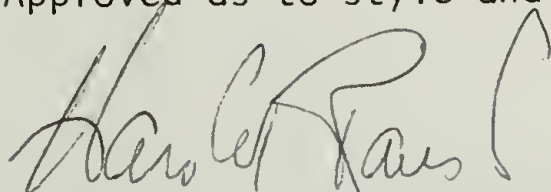
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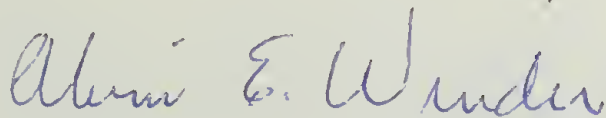
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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement--or thanks--seems a tame term for the time, thought, effort and support given in such generous measure by Harold Raush, Cass Turner and Alvin Winder--faculty members sponsoring this clinical research. Cass Turner's sharing of our enthusiasm, from even the first moment of the conception of the idea, provided inestimable support for the clinical aspect of the project: week in and week out as he listened to our verbal reports and the tape recordings of the sessions his clinical acumen, insight and empathy sustained us throughout the difficult months of our work with these poignant youngsters. His dedicated commitment to experiencing the whole intensive clinical effort with us extended even to joining with us in taking the group on an all-day celebration to a forest in the mountains for a long hot June day of driving, hiking, singing, cooking and eating together, and games, at the end of the group sessions.

Harold's excitement for our excitement--his enthusiasm for our enthusiasm--again, from the first moment of the research idea to the last day of writing--encouraged us, spurred us on and sustained us in a way we found profoundly heartwarming, through the huge task of analyzing our data. Throughout both the clinical and research aspects of the work, Al Winder's multifaceted knowledge and expertise--in adolescence as a developmental stage, in clinical theory, in group therapy and counselling, and in working with youngsters in trouble, along with his generosity and warmth in sharing his knowledge and time with us, created still another exemplary base of ever-present support.

We owe additional thanks to Hal Jarmon, Director of our training

clinic, for his support in permitting us to go off on an independent clinical journey as a clinic outreach project, while first year students. An additional person whose expertise and interest provided valuable support was Dave Todd, from whom we gained much helpful knowledge into the more sophisticated intricacies of field research, through his Field Methods course.

## PROLOGUE

This research represents part of a collaborative effort, of a kind atypical to our knowledge: we see it as a "tree model". Our separate research proposals from our two different "points of view" represented the kinds of questions and ideas for research that one of the pair of us each found generating within himself, and the ways he saw the data possibly yielding answers to this general area of concern: these were the divergent roots of the tree. These separate research decisions led into the common trunk, which represents the basic system--the methods and techniques; the leg work; the thinking out loud; the group counselling sessions and their supervision and planning; the data collection--everything which represented data gathering and working jointly overtime with the same group of young adolescents in the same junior high school. Working together, each assisted the other in the group work at all levels. Each both collected his "own" data, and served as the control participant observer for the other in the amassing of data, from which would be refined the data serving as the basis for the investigative ideas of each. The entire field investigation--that would eventually be individually and independently analyzed--was a joint effort, from which emerged the fruits of the tree: two separate, independent research studies of the same subjects and social system from two distinct frames of reference.

\* \* \* \* \*

## YOUNG ADOLESCENTS IN TROUBLE IN SCHOOL

This is an account of eleven black, and white, youngsters who could not keep out of trouble in "Vernon M. Eldridge Junior High School," in "Green City," an urban New England municipality of approximately 160,000 people.

It presents the results of a clinical research study carried on by a team of two clinical psychologists-in-training, Frank Harrell, a black male, and Patty Owens, a white female.

The youngsters in the group treated in this study were all in the ninth grade of school when the study took place, in 1975, and most of them were fifteen years old.

The method used in this study was that of participant observation. The children were studied in the context of a counselling group in which they asked to be included in order to have a place where they could discuss their fears and concerns about themselves, their school life, their family life, and their delinquent behavior in the community, without fear of punishment, rejection or evaluation.

We have given the youngsters, their school and their city new names to protect their privacy.

\* \* \* \* \*



## WE REAL COOL

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

From The Selected Poems of  
Gwendolyn Brooks

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PART I  
INTRODUCTIONS



## C H A P T E R    1

## THE TWO WORLDS OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Quiet. Orderly. Impassive. That was the picture of Vernon M. Eldridge Junior High School we got standing in "The Office." Four grey-haired women with a unanimous look of impassive efficiency about them sat behind solid grey office desks.

The desks, arranged to form a large, neat rectangle in the massive room, sat behind the long, chest-high counter that seemed to symbolize the separation of the "office people" from the youngsters, who stood timidly in their respectful place until one of the women looked up and acknowledged their presence. There was a subtle difference between the tone in which we, obviously not junior high school students, were politely asked if we could be helped, and the ever-so-slightly surly--expecting-to-be-irritated tone in the "Yes? What is it?" that each of the youngsters who came and stood patiently behind the counter received as a greeting.

A very large round clock prominently mounted high on the wall ticked loudly, proclaiming that time--exact, precise time was understood to have a special importance here. (Here, we saw, was a place where "Time" had to be filled in on the blank space on "permission slips" entitling one to safe passage through the corridors, back to one's classroom. This space where "Time" is filled in is attended to here: it is filled in meticulously, as 8:41, or 10:23, or 2:11, letting one know without question that here a minute is an extraordinarily important thing, not to be taken lightly.)

Voices speak quietly here. The air is hushed. The long yellow pencils with sharpened points are neatly lined up parallel with the grey edge of the desks. Those who live out their workaday lives inside this placid setting live with a wall between them and the world of teeming youth beyond the door that opens onto the school corridors, the classrooms and the cafeterias. So soundproof is the wall that here one senses the implicitly shared notion on this side of the door: that this --not that out there--is Vernon M. Eldridge Junior High School.

Standing here, one feels somehow unaware of--certainly untouched by --the stream of cacophonous young adolescents who surge past at regular intervals, every 46 minutes, for three minutes at a time. Then, for the next 46 minutes, there is no one--so it seems from inside the door--but the office people.

Were they to look up, each 46 minutes, they would catch a glimpse of the passing crowd through the glass portion of the door, but they don't: they are busy; they are conducting the important business of the school.

Whispering, we stepped out of the quiet office into the silent corridor a few minutes before the next interval between classes. We stood against the wall, primed to experience what it was like on the other side of the office door.

Suddenly an astonishingly loud, nerve-jangling siren let out a shrill, strident, long blast. Within three seconds the change in the atmosphere was startling: dozens of doors burst open and spewed forth vast hordes of gangly adolescents. Every square foot of the length and width of the corridor was suddenly jammed with youthful males and females of every size and shape, walking fast, unevenly, lugging large hip-loads of

books; jostling one another in their ebullience, their ungainliness and their crowdedness--some purposely, some because it was difficult not to.

The air was charged with a youthful dynamic vitality seldom experienced in such concentrated doses elsewhere. The hush of the office just across the corridor seemed a long way away.

Indeed it is the concentration of highly-charged youth that one experiences most intensely. The contrast between the "real world" of Vernon M. Eldridge Junior High School (most often called just Eldridge by its intimates) and the official world of the office people on the other side of the office door, closed tight against the din, is extreme. One feels a sense of surprise that the two can exist in such proximity so unmindful of one another's existence.

Physicality is a large component of this concentration of vitality. Groups of two, three and four youngsters, dancing around each other, physically demanding attention even as they progress down the hall, seem the prime target for the snarling censure of the teacher-monitors stationed like military sentinels at periodic intervals for that purpose.

"Keep moving!" "No shoving!" "OK, no running!" "You! Cut that!" "Quit the monkey business!" "OK, you! Over to the wall!" Memories of old war movies grazed my mind. The youngsters--six footers and four footers, girls with pigtails and girls with false eyelashes--don't look up. They have only three minutes to get to their next class and they hurry.

The youngsters walk rapidly, and they talk rapidly and loudly--essential for being heard even minimally over the noise. In one small knot of children after another one or two quick-step around in front of the



others and jog backward, facing the others of the group, in order to be experienced while communicating, yet still obeying the constant stern command to keep moving. Often the communication between two youngsters is given a forceful emphasis with a punch on the arm or in the ribs, playfully. Invariably, such a nonverbal display is greeted with a more forceful physical response: most often with a decided shove hard enough to send the youngster who was facing backward caromming against one of the youngsters a few feet farther ahead, in another grouping. When the shoved boy (the ones we saw were boys) bumped forcibly into the child up ahead, that child most often responded to being bumped into with a punch, another shove, or a snarled epithet. This sequence was repeated with a regularity mimicking a choreographed dance-caricature.

We began to walk down the corridor, to experience the sense of being in the thick of it. This passage inside the stream of surging adolescence was an even more "alive" experience than standing up close along side watching. A real awareness of the physical dimension was jolted home to me when a repetition of the "dance" sequence described above occurred: this time within a group directly ahead of us. A boy was shoved backwards, with so much force that he lurched and careened into me, all but knocking me over. If Frank hadn't grabbed my arm and caught me, I would have gone down.

Apparently part of the code makes it not worthy of notice, when one youngster bumps into another, on the part of the youngster doing the bumping: it's the shoved-into youngster who feels called upon to respond, with something like "Hey, stupid! Whyncha watch where yer going?" To bump into an adult is not covered by the code, and there was considerable

momentary embarrassment on the boy's part. Not until later did I realize that he automatically assumed he would get "kicked out"--the youngsters' term for being "suspended from school" (which is the school's term for not being permitted to attend), regardless of his intention.

Interestingly, none of the embarrassment or concern centered around whether or not I had been hurt, or whether I felt distressed at being so forcibly being bumped into. Physical contact, even forceful, is so much a part of the daily life here that, as we had already seen, the youngster doing the bumping does not see it as anything worthy of comment. And no doubt the self-centeredness of the young adolescent is a large part of this effect. The concern--the boys in the group made much noise about it--was that he was "in trouble now, man!"

There was a look of frowning puzzlement on each of their faces when it became clear that I was not going to take him by the ear and haul him off to the office for punishment. We did not know at that point how unique--how totally outside their ken--my response, or, rather, my omission of a response, was in their junior high school career.

We walked several yards more and suddenly realized we were witnessing another physical scene, this one deliberate and planned, though seemingly spontaneously executed. Ahead of us walked four rather large, husky youths. Just ahead of them walked a slight, shorter, red-haired boy, alone and carrying a pile of books. Unnoticed, we found ourselves with a front-row view of a lightning-like assault on the smaller boy by the group, an assault executed in a split-second sequence quite like that of a fast football play. It happened so rapid-fire that it was almost over before we realized what we were witnessing.

One of the group rabbit-punched the boy first, on one side; then, when he turned in astonishment to see who had hit him, another of the group hit him from the other side: as he swung around to face that assailant, another punched him in the stomach. In the panic of awareness that he was being attacked from every side, he jerked his head back and forth from one side to the other while another of the group punched him from behind. Almost simultaneously one of them tripped him, and, as his books went sprawling and he scrambled down on the floor to retrieve them, a casually-aimed foot came down, whether on his hand or the papers that had spilled from his notebook as he tried to pick them up, we could not see.

The whole startling sequence took no more than 20 seconds, one fast staccato chop following after another, each delivered before he had time to react to the one before it. By the time he got his books and his breath they had disappeared into the crowd and it had been done with such adroitness that he never got to see any of his assailants' faces. It was so spatially timed that it went unnoticed by the teacher-monitor whose job it was to preserve a semblance of order in the corridors. Meanwhile the crowds of non-stop streaming young surged past him, and us, as we stood there wide-eyed and stunned.

This, not our many "first days" in the office being "introduced" to the school and to the "maladjusted" youngsters we interviewed for participation in the group, was our introduction to the world in which we had chosen to be participant observers. We stood still, and we exchanged bewildered looks at one another for a brief second (it was far too noisy for an exchange of words), our eyes communicating our shared sense of a



fleeting hollow feeling in the pit of our stomachs.

Is this, I thought, what it's like to be fourteen years old and in junior high school?

## C H A P T E R 2

### RESEARCH, RESEARCHERS AND SUBJECTS

#### Introductions

The two of us pushed open the door of the sprawling suburban-like junior high school on a late winter morning in 1975 on our way to begin our first day of interviewing the ninth graders from a list of youngsters enrolled there. The names on the list were of youngsters who had been defined by authorities at the school as "moderately disturbed." This definition, we were to come to learn, was a vague catchall for students who were troubled, and who, for the most part, demonstrated this fact by very frequently getting into what the school defined as trouble.

#### The Two of Us: Researchers

As fellow clinical psychologist trainees, Frank Harrell and I discovered that we shared similar attitudes about clinical psychology, and about our ideas of research as an integral part of clinical practice. We shared an interest in exploring human events inherent in applied clinical settings and the implications of these events, and in investigating the needs and conditions for change within human environments--change that might alleviate or ameliorate some of the distress and difficulties in living in those human environments. We learned that we shared a common desire to try to find ways to reach out to find those in need before life stresses became so overwhelming that some of the life-potential might be lost.

We had come to the idea of integrating what we hoped would be therapeutic efforts and research efforts, as a co-counselling team--of a black male and a white female--doing group counselling with a group of troubled young adolescents--a group of teenage males and females--black and white--in a junior high school in a good-sized city. We were not unmindful that our representing, for these youngsters, a perhaps unique pair of adult models might turn out to be relevant.

### Black and White

Approximately 30% of the students in this school are black and many of them are bussed in, in the now-familiar sense of the term (as contrasted with the fact that a large percentage of the entire school population is "bussed in" under the old meaning--a school bus brings them to school because the geographical area served is the kind traditionally requiring transportation by school bus).

### Ninth Graders

This developmental stage seemed a particularly crucial one because the maladaptive syndromes in the junior high school years find these youngsters at an age when they can, and often do, decide to drop out of school for good. General life directions--in a positive or negative direction--seem to begin to take root in these years; youngsters begin, for instance, to look upon themselves as more certainly heading for college, or destined for low status jobs, or to think of early marriage as an escape from the sense of alienation they feel. Here perceptions of where they stand with relation to the rest of society begin to become



more firmly entrenched.

### In Trouble

The youngsters we had chosen to study were from among those already identified as not able to adapt to life stresses in the junior high school with any degree of success or regularity; these were young adolescents who already had a negative label associated with them. That much they all had in common: they were all "known troublemakers", "kids who are always in trouble": they were all categorized as disruptive, defiant, disturbed: as delinquents. But, as even the initial impressions formed in our first interviews demonstrated, any other commonalities were far from readily apparent.

One child, aged 14, could easily pass for 12; one 15-year-old gave the appearance of being closer to 18. Their manner of dress ranged from the unusually neat to the very casual counterculture dress. Family size ranged from an only child to a family so large that the child was uncertain how many brothers and sisters were currently living in the home: he thought about eleven. Birth orders ranged from youngest to oldest. Parental attitude ranged from excessively permissive ("I can do anything I want") to excessively restrictive. There were children in the group living with a mother and a step-father in three cases; one with adoptive parents; one in a single parent home and six who lived with both natural parents.

There were children whose remarks indicated that alcohol was seen as a problem for one of their parents and children whose parents apparently did not drink at all. Some of the parents gave their children personal

spending money unusually freely and some gave their child no spending money. There were children who reported at least one of their parents spending time talking with them (in a way the child perceived as pleasant, i.e., talking together about things, as opposed to being "talked to") and children whose parents reportedly never talked to them other than when "yelling at" them.

Some of the children were beaten severely by parents and one was "never hit," and some almost never hit, although their opposite-sexed siblings were reportedly severely beaten.

There were children whose parents were seen as getting along well together and children who perceived their parents as "never getting along", with at least one child expressing the wish that her parents would separate because there was "never a minute when they're not fighting."

We did not ask the children their parents' occupations--because of our concern for the sensitivity of those youngsters whose parents were perceived, apparently, as occupationally inadequate (and because we believed the school would provide demographic information, which proved not to be so). Nevertheless, their remarks during the sessions on a few occasions made references sufficient to denote the range. There were parents on welfare, families where both parents worked, families where one parent worked; the parent of one child was a probation officer. The majority of the mothers did not work and were home during the day; one child reported that "no one's ever home."

Some of the children were described as leaders; some were followers; some isolates. One child was doing excellent work academically and plan-

ning to go to college; some were either failing or repeating the ninth grade.

That which made these troubled youngsters different from other youngsters in this junior high school was by no means something obvious nor easily observable in many cases. In the warm, unthreatening, un-stressful, supportive, relatively unrestricted atmosphere we strove to create, some of them all of the time, and all of them some of the time, came to appear not unlike the hordes of youth who jostled one another in the crowded streams of cacophonous adolescents up and down the stairways and corridors of this large, bustling school.

Time and again one and another of them would emerge as interested, open, warm, friendly, likeable, compassionate, good-intentioned, concerned, thoughtful; albeit self-conscious, obstreperous, eager for attention, clowning, giggling, defensive, guarded, moody, petulant and a few hundred other remarkably distracting things. We had at times to remind ourselves that these were adolescents who did not appear to the teachers, guidance counselor, vice principal and often to their parents, as we saw them.<sup>1</sup>

We found ourselves confronting the realization that there are two blatantly broad categories into which one might place youngsters of this age which cut across sex, race, early and late maturers, style of self-

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<sup>1</sup> I now believe that while much of this had to do with the milieu we strove to create, much of the reason for the children's being able to behave in "positive" ways was tied to the fact that we were consistent, predictable and unambiguous in our communications and interactions with them, implicitly and explicitly. We, it turned out, were perceived as atypical adults in their lives in that whatever demands and expectations we made of them were discussed with them, made clear, and held to consistently yet flexibly.

presentation; level of intelligence, etc.: those who do manage to get through the three storm-ridden, hectic, developmentally stressful years of junior high school without being in constant trouble with parents, teachers, school officials and peers; and those who, while seeming to have all, or many, of the same characteristics on the surface, do not manage to get through these years without getting into constant trouble.

### Research Questions and Goals

#### Early Questions

I found myself asking wherein lies the difference(s) between those who can cope, can manage, can adapt to life stresses--those who can get along in school at this crucial developmental stage, and those who cannot. I set out, then, to try to determine if it might be possible to garner data which might reveal one or more common threads--modal characteristics--among these youngsters in our groups who were in constant trouble throughout their junior high school careers. A major question became the impact that this environment--the junior high school itself, as a system--had on these youngsters.

#### Goals

My general goal was to try to look at how these adolescents, as a group and as individuals, irrespective of their individual adolescent developmental levels, perceive the school environmental forces, and how they respond to this perception: how do they interpret the data of their experience; what kind of sense do they make of this work in which



they are "always in trouble."

I planned to try to trace the relationships that might exist among their observed and reported attitudes, their response patterns and their skills for engaging the system, and the attitudes, transmitted values and response patterns transmitted through parental influence as well as those transmitted through the influence of the school.<sup>2</sup>

I planned to utilize their words, their behavior, their responses and their expressed attitudes to each other, and to us, along with those reported, described and unwittingly expressed about themselves, parents, teachers, school officials, peers and others, as the observed and reported data.

### Method

The method we chose to employ was that of participant observation. A careful reading of authors discussing the participant observation approach (McCaill, 1969; Raush, 1969; Vidich, 1969; Schwartz & Schwartz, 1955; Hudson, 1972; Kaplan, 1964; Lofland, 1971; Becker & Geer, 1960) points up problems we had to confront--problems involving data collection, analysis, presentation; participant bias; unusual time expenditure; the inherent ambiguity and tentativeness one must be willing to work under in collecting data, as well as a dearth (and in many parts, complete absence) of specific guidelines laid down by others, along with questions of relevance, precision and generalizability. Be-

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<sup>2</sup>And I planned to leave the research door ajar to permit me to alter these goals somewhat, should the close analysis of the data come up with surprises: we felt a commitment to not wearing blinders--to let the research itself point up what other things might come to show themselves as equally, or perhaps more, relevant.

cause all these issues are discussed in detail by these authors, the full ramifications of each will not be discussed here.

A relevant question from the standpoint of clarification in terms of this study centers around the choice and the advisability of the participant observation method here. Why opt for participant observation methodology in this particular area of inquiry?

We elected participant observation because it is a methodological tool eminently suited to the kinds of information we wanted to investigate. For this investigation it was crucial, for the most part, not to manipulate predetermined variables; it was essential to find out what conditions and what controls operated on their own; it was important to learn from the youngsters what the extant variables were and whether they changed over time; and if so, as a function of what. We saw it as crucial to create an atmosphere where we could participate and observe what would happen. For such a study the data themselves must, I believe, decide what variables are relevant.<sup>3</sup> We knew we must try to take account of important variables in the natural setting. We felt it important clinically to encourage one subject to influence the behavior of the others. And we wanted to have room to consider the youngsters' past and recent experiences elsewhere as important influences on their reactions throughout the study.

In participant observation (which, as McCall (1969) points out, is misleadingly regarded as a single method rather than a characteristic

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<sup>3</sup>As Cronbach wrote (1954), "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our hypotheses and our observations should be open to them" (p. 124).

blend or combination of methods and techniques) the studies involve repeated, genuine social interactions on the scene, with the subjects themselves a part of the data-gathering process. In McCall's definition, participant observation is the blend of methods and techniques characteristically employed in studies of social situations or complex social organizations of all sorts, with the end result an analytic description of the complex social organization (primitive band, criminal gang, occupation group, mental hospital, community or the like).

#### Participant Observation in Clinical Research

As Raush (1969) points out, the strategy of participant-observation is the source of the clinician's power as scientific investigator.

Like any other personal contact between people, such as marriage or student-teacher relationships, the contract between client and therapist legitimizes a special class of interventions. Unlike most other contracts, however, the therapy relationship empowers the therapist to intervene for the purpose of studying the client, and, even more important, of studying the relationship itself (p. 125).

We, as clinicians, were going into the "natural habitat" of those whom we wished to observe and study and with whom we wished to participate in therapeutic intervention. We defined the stimulus situation by our participation as group counsellors, but considered the subjects' entire range of responses to be of interest. At the same time, we were mindful that eventually we would each have to determine a narrower set of responses on which to concentrate our analysis and presentation efforts,

### Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

The literature on qualitative research states, repeatedly, that the task of analyzing one's data in a participant observation study is close to overwhelming. In this study, of a group of troubled young adolescents interacting over time--for reasons that will become eminently clear--so too were the tasks of data collection, and later, presentation of what was learned.

#### Collection

The subjects did not sit quietly and take turns speaking or behaving, nor could they be counted on to stay on one topic for very long. Tempers flaired, tears welled, defensiveness ran rampant, as one young hurting adolescent vied with another--verbally and physically--for attention. In the midst of a serious group discussion one youngster would often suddenly erupt into idiosyncratic disruption, carrying away that which was ongoing on the heels of quickly infectious uproar.

In this kind of setting, it was no easy task, we learned, to observe even most of what was going on. The most any research can promise to do, under these unusual, and sometimes downright frenetic conditions, is to observe as meticulously as possible, record as carefully as possible, keep both eyes and ears open, and then make the most sensible, painstaking, careful analyses of the data one can.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Audio tape recordings were used, but in this setting, more cacophony was recorded than anything else.



## Analysis

In a participant observation study, analysis is a monumental task. Eventually, so one hopes, a pattern, embedded and enmeshed within the raw data, will become visible if one seeks painstakingly enough. This is far from a passive task: it is the researcher's task, after amassing this small mountain of data, to discover this inherent order. Confronted with such a vastness of data, detecting the pattern, the common threads, the modal characteristics, is by no means simple to provide a formula for. Nor do the specifics of what one has learned--once one has been able to recognize them--leap off the endless pages of field notes and verbatim transcripts.<sup>5</sup>

## Presentation

Moreover, even after a pattern has emerged, the task of organizing and presenting one's analysis and one's inferences is a mammoth undertaking.<sup>6</sup> Even in a world where most effects are interactive (Campbell, 1963) the interactive variables influencing the behavior of these children comes through as staggering. From the massive data collected over months of participating with and observing these youngsters in one of

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<sup>5</sup>I insert this for the benefit of others who may choose this atypical research path. Apparently one has to come close to the point of despairing that such a pattern does exist in his collection of data before at last patience and endurance are rewarded, and it does emerge. From that point on, the pattern seems obvious: one is surprised that it required so much patience to discover it.

<sup>6</sup>This task seems not yet spelled out in the few suggestions for travellers of this route to psychological research. Once one has uncovered the pattern, the articulating of that pattern, I found, was a far more difficult task even than discovering it.

their natural habitats, these interactions seemed to thread in and around, over, under and through their dialogues and their behavior in a labyrinthine maze, which seemed at first to defy unravelling. There is, now, no question that the data demonstrate these interaction effects dramatically. One of the predominant features of the interactive effects found to be influencing the disordered behavior of these adolescents is confusion. Setting forth confusion--yet presenting it as not confusing--was a prodigious problem in the presentation of the results of this investigation. My hope is that I will be able to articulate these effects, interwoven as they are in such an endless system of feedback loops, as clearly as they deserve to be seen.

For the most part this material will derive from excerpts selected from what I saw as salient categories. These categories were not decided upon in advance of the study as facets to be focussed upon; rather, the data demonstrated their salience: these are the categories for which most youngsters in the group got in trouble most often, and about which more of them made more references (although they talked about very many other topics).

Having selected these categories for their relevance in the youngsters' troubled world, then, I analyzed all of the data for references to each of these categories. The references were then analyzed from the standpoint of the youngsters' perceptions of family environmental influences as they related to each of these categories, and from the standpoint of school environmental influences as they related to each of these categories.

### A Methodological Problem

Frank and I were aware that one of the questions important to direct one's attention to is that of experimenter bias. One of the values in doing research as a team lay in the fact that there were two participant observers to observe, participate and interpret, as well as analyze, the same series of sequences of events simultaneously and independently, thus serving as one another's control against experimenter bias. In this way we also provided for one another and for the research an opportunity for control of "bias" through the integration and presentation of interpretations of the same data collection from the perspectives of a male participant observer, a female participant observer, a black participant observer and a white participant observer.

### Subjects

After many weeks of preparatory work, we drove to the school to begin interviewing each child jointly, with each of us doing about 50% of the actual interviewing. We told them who we were and that we were there because we liked working with people their age. We told them that what we wanted to do was run a group once a week during school hours where, we hoped, they could learn more about themselves and about some of the things they might be having difficulty with, whether those were at home, at school, with friends, or anywhere.

We asked each youngster if he had any idea of why the guidance counsellor might have included his or her name on the list and almost invariably the child broke into a grin at that question and said something like

"yeah, because I get into so much trouble," giggling self-consciously in the manner of young adolescents. We asked each one if the group and its purpose, as we had so far described it, sounded like something he would like to participate in and each one said yes.

The youngsters we interviewed, which we did in a small conference room at the school, were all ninth graders, some for the second time. After each interview, I made some brief notes of my initial impression of the youngster. They were:

Danny, age 15, a slight, slim, fair, white male, repeating ninth grade, who reported repeated trouble with the school authorities and at home. He had that day been "kicked out" of both school cafeterias for "disruptive and defiant behavior" (the school authorities' definition). He gave an impression of being a defeated person, one who expects to be misunderstood, and school administrators echoed this attitude. He expressed open hostility and fear of "black students hassling him in the cafeteria," and then brazened out a long defiant piece of braggadocio about how "they better watch out because if they try anything--they wouldn't dare--because there's a lot more white kids than blacks and they know what would happen to them if they tried anything."

Charlie, age 15, an average-build black male with a somewhat "babyish" appearance and manner (e.g., petulance, pouting, etc.). He was out of school for months, he said, last year, for a hip-pin operation, apparently of non-traumatic origin. He gave the impression of being an extremely sensitive youngster, his eyes welling up with tears reporting an incident that took place that day, in which he was, reportedly, "unjustly accused of cheating despite [his] having evidence that it was another stu-



dent, a girl, who actually did the cheating." He reported himself as formerly an 'A' student in math in his previous junior high school and here an 'F' student, because of "unfairness." Much of what Charlie said during the interview carried the impression of a kind of extravagant dramatization, and of a very young boy who was either being unusually unjustly treated or else experiencing an unusual need for excessive exaggeration. And in either case, he seemed to be conveying the impression of feeling an extreme need for an 'advocate', for someone to be 'on his side to run interference for him.' He was making a very determined effort to be appealing (and succeeding), going to some lengths to show us that he was very 'well-mannered and polite' (e.g., he elaborately pulled a chair out for me at the beginning of the interview and thanked Frank warmly for opening the door for him and me while en route to the conference room together). He appeared spontaneously back at the conference room after school to earnestly solicit our intervention in a dispute with one of his teachers.

Beth, age 15, a white female with a large frame, a pleasant face, a nice smile and a very friendly manner. She seemed very eager to participate in the group. She spoke of having been heavily involved with drugs the previous year, of having run away from home the previous year with her boyfriend, of now back living at home but of having a considerable amount of 'trouble' at home with her parents.

Duke, age 15, a black male of average build but giving the appearance of being physically strong and athletic. He had been reported as being quite bright and sharp and "the kingpin" among the boys in the school. Reportedly he insisted on remaining in the "lowest" sections in

his classes, steadfastly resisting repeated efforts to get him to "move up" to "higher" sections because he was regularly at the top of his classes and considerably beyond the achievement level of that level in each of his subjects. He gave an impression of 'cockiness' combined with 'playing dumb' and at times of being somewhat of a 'loudmouth'. However incongruent it may sound following those impressions, he came across as very pleasant, very friendly and very likable.

Bernadette, age 15, a very friendly, smiling, attractive black girl of large frame--a friend and neighbor of Duke. She was reported as being the "queen pin" at school. She expressed surprise during the interview: she had "expected to be turned off by [us] as 'psychiatrists' wanting to practice on us and find about our problems"; then grinningly, winningly, admitted that 'yes, she sure had a lot of them,' Characteristic of her speech is that she does not articulate words clearly and it was not always easy, and not always possible, to understand each word of what she says.

Amy, age 15, a white female of 'sexy' appearance, giving an immediate impression of being more socially 'advanced' than most junior high school girls. She wore rather elaborate makeup, appeared older than 15, came across as very 'sophisticated' for her age. A very likeable and very pleasant girl, she spoke of going out with "older guys who drive cars" and animatedly (which appeared to be her characteristic style) reported being in serious trouble at home all the time but much more so since the recent event of "having driven [her] father's car through the closed garage doors." She asked to be allowed to take the permission slip home by hand so that she could give it to her mother as her father

would see it if it went through the mail. He would, she said, insist, no matter what the letter said, that it meant she was in trouble again at school and he would make life even more unbearable for her than it already was. In reply to a reflection about her father, she replied "My father? Yeah, he's a winner, a real winner!", in an exceptionally sarcastic tone of voice, quite at variance with the noticeably 'soft-spoken' tone in which the rest of her conversation was expressed.

Sammy, age 14, a short, solidly built white male with a pleasant but somewhat 'baby-faced' appearance. He gave the impression of being shy, reticent and/or withdrawn; it was not easy for him to engage in conversation with us anywhere near the degree that the others interviewed did. His appearance--his clothing--was very neat, noticeably so compared to the average male style of dress in the school (which itself was not sloppy). He was reportedly on the verge of failing ninth grade. Though he said very little he did say that he would like to be in the group, but showing on the surface none of the eagerness many of the others seemed to convey.

Laurence, age 15, a handsome black male with a nice smile when he smiled but that was only once: throughout most of the interview his appearance was 'steely'; his manner, seemingly sullen. He gave the impression of being very guarded; he said very few words and used shoulder shrugs and head nods to communicate a fair amount of the time. The one sudden grin that suddenly crossed his face in the middle of the interview happened at an inappropriate-seeming time and may have simply been nervous tension: he said that he didn't want to say what had made him smile (actually he communicated this by shaking his head no when asked if he

wanted to tell us what had made him feel like grinning). He said that he "gets in trouble, gets kicked out, curses teachers." It came as a surprise when he said yes he would like to be in the group and yes he would talk in the group.

Helen, age 15, an extremely overdeveloped female, not only for a junior high school girl; even by adult standards her female shape (breasts, hips and legs) would be described not only as "sexy" but as decidedly atypical. She was when we interviewed her still out of school on suspension, having been out for the past seven weeks or so, awaiting permission from the school system central office to be allowed to return to school. Her current suspension was for having been in a fight--for having "beaten up a boy at school." She reported having been heavily involved in drugs, that her father is an alcoholic, that "things are better at home now since my mother put my father out." She expressed concern about wanting to get back in school and about making up her missed homework. She is, she said, "reformed" now from all her "bad ways" and now wants to help other kids learn the importance of "reforming." She repeated several times that she had been in an "awful lot of really bad trouble but I've learned my lesson." She expressed great interest in being in the group, although implicitly conveying the message that her purpose there would be to teach the others about how bad it really is to get into trouble. Her style of speaking is very "breezy" and friendly, coupled with an impression of "coming on strong." We found her likeable and needful.

Andrea, age 16, an average frame, average-appearing white female seeming rather stiff and constrained. She did not appear over-friendly at the first meeting; she never smiled and did not say much at all. She



gave the impression of cautiously assessing us. She gets suspended often and is repeating ninth grade.

Dolores, age 15, a pleasant-appearing, average-frame, black female who was absent on each of the days we were interviewing. She was reported by school authorities as having been "very militant" and a "militant leader", the previous year. We found ourselves agreeing that if we had not been told that, it was not a characteristic we would ascribe to her. She impressed us as being very likeable, very bright, perceptive and thoughtful.

#### Participant Observation: Preparation

Our carefully laid plans were underway; we had been working for many weeks on this project. We had read from countless sources on group therapy, on co-therapy, on group work with adolescents, on adolescent behavior and the problems intrinsic to this developmental stage even in "well-adjusted" individuals. We had described our proposal and received a commitment from a research advisor, from the clinic director at our training clinic, from a clinical supervisor, from the principal of the junior high school, the guidance counselor, the children's parents, the librarian in charge of the conference room we were to use for our sessions, the audiovisual department for the use of videotaping equipment, from eleven troubled adolescents, and from each other. We had typed letters explaining our group to parents and typed permission forms for them to return--for their children's participation and for permission to videotape the sessions. We had addressed and stuffed envelopes, licked stamps, spent hours in the school office--working out children's computerized class

schedules and bell schedules, learning to use the school switchboard--for calling the children to the office for individual interviews, and writing passes for kids to get out of, and back into, classrooms. We had begun the endless hours of writing field notes, of talking, of planning sessions, and advice-seeking, of supervisory sessions, of travelling back and forth to Green City--most often through rain and snow--and of eating a sandwich for lunch en route in the car because there weren't enough hours in the days to accomplish all that was necessary for each of our days in Eldridge, embedded as they were within the context of our regular training program. And we had not yet had our first group session.

## C H A P T E R 3

## GETTING THE GROUP OFF THE GROUND: THE BEGINNING SESSIONS

This section, taken from my field notes journal of the first four sessions, seemed a good way to generate a feel for what the beginning sessions were like--at least as much as it is possible, on paper, to do that. There is no way to set bedlam and frenetic behavior on paper: the tameness of the printed word belies, to an extreme degree, what these youngsters, their behavior, their interactions with each other, and with us, were actually like as living experiences.

The intent here is to introduce the youngsters, in the context of the beginning group sessions. While by no means complete, even for simply what was said, the words do serve to present a broad-stroke sketch of the thirteen of us--Frank and I, and the youngsters--as we worked together to get our group off the ground.

The First Session

"I've been in trouble so much so long that I wouldn't know what it was like not to be in trouble. I can't remember a time when I wasn't always in trouble. That's what I'd wish for to have changed about my life: to be someone who wasn't in trouble all the time."

--Andrea

\* \* \* \* \*

Frank and I arrived at Eldridge Junior High at 11:45 a.m. The first thing we learned when we walked in, from the guidance counselor, was that the children who had not been selected for the group were "hot." We felt really bad about this. We had thought that the letter we had written to

each of those not able to be included, explaining that we had wanted them all but simply could not possibly include everyone, would have assuaged their feelings. And we had taken great pains in each individual interview to make it very clear that there was a good chance, for each child interviewed, that he or she might not be able to be included in the group, because we had been given so many names.

The next, minor, problem was finding that the room we had been promised had been taken over by a teacher who was using it to administer reading tests. This set us back in our schedule and when the room was finally vacated, we hurriedly worked at setting up the video equipment and simultaneously trying to interview Andrea, who had been absent on all of the interviewing days. I opened the returned permission forms--for the videotaping--which the guidance counselor had been saving to give us in one packet, and found two more dismaying surprises. The parents of two of the children had refused permission for their children to be present if the sessions were going to be videotaped. So, although by that time the videotape equipment was all set up, we were unable to use it.

The biggest dismay, however, was that Mary's mother had refused permission for Mary to participate in the group at all. This caused us great distress, because both Frank and I had considered Mary the one youngster who most sorely needed some kind of professional help.

When the siren shrieked signalling the beginning of fifth period, the youngsters began trooping into the room. The first to enter, to our surprise, was Dennis, one of those who had not been included in the final group make-up--demanding to know how come we had forgotten to make out a pass for him for that period. It was then we learned that the school had



somehow slipped and failed to deliver the letters we had written to those children who could not be included. The youngsters, apparently, thought --or hoped--it might be a mistake that we had not sent passes for them to come to the session. We explained to Dennis, and apologized sincerely, and he accepted this information and left, hurt but seemingly understanding about it.

As the rest of the group bounded in en masse, Louise, one of the others who had not been included, flounced in belligerently. Militantly she sat herself down with a loud, insolent "I'm here and I'm staying!" diatribe, telling us that we might think we could, but that we couldn't, make her leave. Frank and I were dumbstruck. Of all the possibilities we had imagined for our first day of group sessions, nothing had prepared us for this dramatic, untoward beginning. We tried to explain gently but firmly to Louise but to no avail: she was determined to show us that she did not have to accept our decision. She put her hands on her hips and, with an expression of open hostility, stared us down. The whole group watched fascinated at this confrontation between the two "group leaders" and the one fifteen-year-old ninth grader testing our limits.

Finally, Frank led Louise outside the room and talked to her in the library. After a very long time, Louise finally left but not until she had told both of us what she thought of us in no uncertain--and in very hostile and very angry--terms. It was hard to take, for us as much as for Louise.

That first day we briefly restated what we had told each child individually the week before. We again carefully described the purpose of the group and the kind of commitment each of them would be making if they de-

cided to stay as participants: to attend regularly once a week throughout the rest of the school year, and to be willing to share some of their problems and feelings with other members of the group. We asked any who had second thoughts about wanting to make this kind of contract to say so. All professed agreement of their willingness to make this kind of contract with us.

One of the things we wanted to accomplish that first day was to give everyone a chance to introduce himself to the group. Structuring it to try to make it easier for them, we asked each child if he would do this by sharing one thing he most wished were different about some aspect of his life, either at school or anywhere, and one thing he most wished could be different about him personally, if he could be magically granted two wishes. We asked them to take the initiative in volunteering to do this rather than being called on. This was difficult for them and there were several minutes of awkward squirming before anyone was able to. Andrea began, saying that her first wish, about herself as an individual, was

" . . .that I was in the tenth grade, instead of taking the ninth grade over. If I could have one wish to change something about my life I'd wish I could stop being in trouble all the time. I've been in trouble so much so long that I wouldn't know what it was like not to be in trouble. I can't remember a time when I wasn't always in trouble. That's what I'd wish for to have changed about my life: to be someone who wasn't in trouble all the time."

I remember feeling very moved by Andrea's ability and willingness to share this--to expose herself to such a degree. For Andrea gives the impression of being tough, hard, sullen, sarcastic and distant. It was not

until later that I was struck by the fact that what Andrea had demonstrated was that "being in trouble" was something she perceived as not an aspect of her as an individual, but as an aspect of some part of her life; her environment. Unknowingly, she was saying that while it is she who is in trouble all the time, it is she interacting with those who make up her life--the system of Andrea and those who label her as deviant as a result of her interactions with them, that is in trouble all the time. . .for as long as she can remember.

Beth was next.

"I wish I was in tenth grade too. About my life, I wish I didn't have so many hassles with my mother and father all the time. I'm always in trouble too. I wish there was a way that could be different,"

Amy prefaced her remarks by saying that she wanted us to know that what she was going to say might sound ridiculous and as if she was trying to make everyone laugh but she wasn't: that she meant it seriously. What she wished was different about herself was that she had not driven her father's car through the closed garage door.

"About my life, I wish my parents would get separated."

What Bernadette wished could be different about her life, she said, was wrapped up in her relationship with her brothers. "I hate my brothers," she said. "Especially the one in seventh grade: I hate him the most." She felt quite positive that there was nothing she would want to have different about herself. "I like myself the way I am." As with almost everything Bernadette said throughout the months we spent with her, we had to ask her to repeat this; her speech was so extremely indistinct,

and so softly mumbled, that no amount of straining attentively could catch her words.

Duke was next. Part of his introduction of himself was his tilting the chair he was sitting on so far backward that it seemed he would surely fall over. Duke too said--in a loud, clear voice--that there was nothing he would like to see different about himself. He fervently wished, with regard to the circumstances of his life, that he was back in sixth grade

"...because in sixth grade when you have fun, you don't get in trouble, but here when you have fun, you get in trouble for it, so that's what I wish was different about my life."

The small, withdrawn Sammy seemed somewhat intimidated in the group of youngsters who were, for the most part, so much bigger physically and so much more self-possessed in appearance. Almost inaudibly, he admitted that he wished very much that he could be different by growing taller (whereupon Danny, who had said nothing at all so far, echoed that sentiment forcefully though quietly: "Me too!") Danny was obviously startled that someone had spoken of having as his most important wish something that meant so much to him.) Sammy continued, saying the thing he would most like to see changed about his life would be that his father stop hassling him all the time. "Hassling", it became clear through the sessions, has more than one level of meaning. To some it connoted a milder form of being annoyed, irritated, having demands placed upon them to come home early in the evening, etc. Plainly, to Sammy, at least as he used it in connection with his father, the word obviously meant much more severe harassment--psychological and physical. It meant severe beatings,



and much traumatic punishment.

Danny went next since he had already begun by saying he too wished very much to be taller. His words tumbled out fast. About his life circumstances, he said forcefully:

"I wish I wasn't here! No! I don't mean here, in the group! I mean living here in Green City! I wish I was living somewhere far away, like Colorado. By myself! Well, without my parents I mean. What I really wish was different in my life was that I lived far away from my parents!"

Danny's wish was the only one that came true during the course of the group sessions. Three weeks later his parents withdrew him from the school and sent him away to live with some relatives in another state. (The school authorities echoed, for their part, the reported statement of his parents: "maybe they can do something with him.")

Laurence found it very hard to say anything. Finally, with difficulty, he said what he wished was different was "that I wasn't in school; that I was out of here." Drawn out by Frank, he admitted sheepishly that this was because he was "afraid he wouldn't make it to the twelfth grade." He wasn't sure, he said, whether you would call this a wish about him personally, or about his life. Then he said that what he did wish was different about himself was that he could control his

". . . getting mad and cussing the teacher out and walking out of the room and getting in trouble about that."

I found myself wondering how many of the many teachers who had had Laurence punished for that sequence of behaviors, executed in Laurence's steely, disdainful manner, would have guessed that these were things that

Laurence counted as the biggest thing he wished he were able to change about himself.

Helen, in her unfailing familiar, breezy manner of speaking, introduced herself with

"I wish my parents would get back together!"

During the interview, a week before, she had said that "things are so much better at home now since my mother put my father out, because of all the fighting all the time." Today she said that was no longer true: now that her father didn't come home anymore, her mother took it out on her and blamed her for the fact that her father didn't come home. We did not know then what later became so vividly clear: that Helen was the one youngster universally disliked by her peers.

Charles--who did not show up until the following week--facing up with mock bravado to having to speak of himself without the support of hearing others do it, took a deep breath and spilled words out, cautiously, in one breath:

"My name is Charles Thomas and what I wish was different in my life was my grades period."

Looking back, I can realize now that those who spoke that first day, supported by the mutual disclosures, had each disclosed a paramount concern. Charles, unaware of the level of self-disclosure, had opted for one of the more acceptable problems in his life. As soon as he became aware that there was some atypical code operating in this room that somehow made it all right to admit personal feelings in this room full of

peers, Charles was quickly as able, if not more so, than the others, to disclose his primary concerns. He never mentioned his grades again. But a week never went by without his making it abundantly clear, in one way or another, that his concerns centered around his parents' fighting; his difficulty in getting along with teachers, and his deep wish to be liked.

By the time Dolores arrived in the group, the rest were too far past the introduction stage, and we did not ask her to put herself through this.

When we asked them to "introduce themselves" by sharing two things they would wish for if they could have two magic wishes that could change two things, about themselves and about their lives, our thought was only to make it easier for them to begin being members of their group by saying something about themselves to the group. We were sure that if we just suggested they "tell the group something about yourself" that they would say something like "I'm in the ninth grade", or, what seemed more likely, that they would say "I can't think of anything to say." Told to pretend they could have two magic wishes, we imagined the kinds of things they would "wish for" would be things like wishing they were rich, or famous, or that they owned a car, or that there was no such thing as school. We had never anticipated that they would disclose real, personal concerns, and on the first day of being in a group of their peers. Indeed, one of the difficulties we had been led to expect about working in a group situation with young adolescents was that their self-consciousness might make it impossible for them ever to discuss their real concerns in such a context.

We cannot help wondering, even now, which of the many possible fac-

tors made it so that this could and did happen. Was it simply the impact of being listened to by two adults who expressed sincere interest in them and their difficulties in a non-judgmental way in the individual interviews? Did it have something to do with our description of what the group would be--a place where they could talk about their feelings and the ways in which they found life difficult; a place where together we might learn something about kids who are always in trouble? Did it perhaps have something to do with the atypical configuration of a black man and a white woman accepting and trusting one another enough to choose to work together? Was there perhaps some implicit message in that fact for these black and white, male and female, youngsters--so uncertain and so wary of one another, the blacks so unsure that one could trust whites, the whites so unsure one could trust blacks, the males uncertain about how accepting females might be, the females so uncertain of the males? Was it perhaps simply a fortuitous function of the way the "topic" was worded--as if they would be speaking of a "magic wish"--that made it "distant" enough for them to be able to give voice to what really mattered to them? We're not sure. But it seemed a good beginning.

#### An Early Hypothesis Generated by the Data

Later I realized that there was a pattern threading through their "wishes": of those nine children who participated in the original introductions, every youngster differentiated between the variable he viewed as "something about himself as an individual" and that which he viewed as "something about his life." In every case the variable viewed as "something about him as an individual" can be seen to relate to the



child's self-esteem or self-image, In every instance the variable viewed as "something about his life" is one involving interactions with others. While this may seem, after the fact, as a self-evident distinction, for me it is one generated by the data and not a hypothesis I would have felt confident making a priori.

Those youngsters who were able to articulate, that first day of the group sessions, the variable of their "being in trouble all the time" as a function of their life circumstances, rather than a trait or characteristic of them as individuals, were, although I did not know it at the time, pointing to one of the hypotheses which the data would later generate for me, and which the final analysis of the data would come to seem to support.

Simply stated, that first hypothesis generated by the data was that the "problem" in these "problem children" is not totally, if at all, something intrinsic to the child: it is a problem tied to the interaction of several disjunctive systems in which the child is enmeshed.

This was contrary to the implicit assumption apparently held by the sundry authority figures in their lives: the school authorities, for instance, repeatedly communicated the implicit message that it was each of these children who was "a problem"--that needed resolving, or correcting --rather than the "problem" resting in the interaction between the child and the school.

### Beginning Rules

The other thing we had planned to do that first day was to try to get the youngsters to discuss and establish rules for themselves about

how they would like to be with each other in the group. This was more difficult for them than sharing a deep personal concern. Bernadette finally began:

"I think we should make a rule that we don't get mad in here."

Too naive at this point to understand the frightening and anxiety-provoking implications that "being mad" held for many of these youngsters --what "being mad" led to for them and the reactions it brought down on them from parents and school--we interjected that this room was a safe place to allow themselves to get mad if they felt angry. We did not gain an understanding of the distressed uneasiness this generated until much later. No one would speak about "getting mad" that day, except to heatedly insist we should have a rule against doing it in the group.

A little later in the discussion Andrea angrily interjected that she didn't think we should allow the kind of disruptive "carrying on" that Duke and Laurence had been engaging in consistently. (They had been giggling, poking, punching, and prodding one another, and whispering back and forth.) In the hectic discussion of this that ensued, the siren sounded and the first session was over.

### The Second Session: Blind Walk

Today, in the few quiet minutes before the group arrived, we felt a little more calm about the idea of participating in this group of ours, yet simultaneously a little more aware of how difficult working with a group of troubled young adolescents can be. Already it had come to seem

impossible that these scared, hostile, defensive, immature young people could ever coalesce to help one another share their feelings in a mutually helpful way or learn to listen to one another.

Then, the godawful siren! Time and again I found myself wondering why any institution would purposely install a system to signal nothing more unusual than the beginning and end of school classes using a siren so shrill and jarring that no matter how many times we experienced it, we were never able to become inured to it nor to keep from physically flinching.

Who would have guessed that the same problem we began with last week would greet us again? Louise came in again! Flouncing is the only word I can think of that describes the manner in which she entered the room and sat in the group circle of chairs. This time the group knew it was a real confrontation. In my heart I wanted very much to take Louise in. My head said that there was a lot more involved in taking that course than just making me--and presumably Louise--momentarily feel better. There had been serious reasons for not including Louise in the group constellation: only one of these was that Louise's reputed violence was so uncontrolled that we felt close to certain that the group would not be able to function at all if she were a member. (A few weeks later she was to be suspended from school for the entire rest of the year for violent acting out.) Nevertheless, we agonized over this a great deal and decided that we had better hold off and ask for some more supervisory advice. Feeling heartsick about adding more rejection into her life, we told Louise as gently as possible that it would not be possible for her to stay.

Today we wanted to capture the kids' interest as quickly as possible --to provide them with some feeling that this was not going to be a place where everyone just sat around and fretted over everyone's inability to start "talking to each other about their problems", a sentiment Andrea and Beth had expressed the previous week. We had chosen to try to engage them through a non-threatening nonverbal exercise, the "blind walk."

In this exercise participants are grouped in pairs, with one the leader and the other the "unseeing" follower, who, with closed eyes, permits the leader to guide him. Holding him with one arm across his back and the other holding his elbow, the leader nonverbally guides the "unseeing" person around various obstacles (chairs, walls, tables, etc.). The goal is for the "unseeing" one to trust in the person leading him--that he will keep him safe from all harm and be concerned for his welfare. The leader, ideally, comes to feel empathic in caring for another. The unseeing person, ideally, passes from an initial uneasiness of being totally dependent on another to a realization that he is safe--that he can trust another with his welfare. The pair alternate being leader.

Duke, we sensed, was the most likely to take a disruptive clowning stance when it was being done by everyone together. We were certain that with their eyes closed the other youngsters would be made intensely anxious by Duke's customary wild "carrying-on", so Frank was going to demonstrate it with Duke as his partner. By making him the model from the beginning, and by identifying him with the male leader, we hoped he might be dissuaded from hamming it overmuch. We were wrong. In what we came to know as Duke's style, he played it for a rowdy laugh even when demonstrating it with Frank. And during the exercise, as we had predicted,



Duke distressed the others by wild clowning. Despite their uneasiness at Duke's behavior, the group got into the exercise fairly well, although with no real engagement of themselves.

Afterwards, when we asked people to talk about how they felt during the exercise, no one used the word trust, nor understood the concept in this connection. There was much naive interpretation; that the purpose had been to show them what it would feel like to be blind--so that they "would understand how blind people felt", or, "in case we every got blind", etc. We were surprised at the complete absence of the conceptualization of trust in their repertoire. Even when we spelled it out explicitly, there was a reaction of puzzled frowning. We eventually concluded that developmentally they were perhaps not yet at a cognitive level that would encompass this kind of abstract thinking.

When the siren sounded, we felt the session had gone fairly well, all things considered, but we were realizing more and more that there was much to learn about how to make anything constructive begin to happen in a group of troubled adolescents.

### The Third Session

"There ain't no love in my home."--Charles

\* \* \* \* \*

Louise didn't show up. Danny, Duke and Bernadette were late. Charles loudly congratulated himself for being on time, insisting that "the others are takin' advantage of y'all, using their passes to be goin' "

in the halls." Three members of the group weren't here today: they had been suspended from school. Sammy had been suspended for fighting; Beth--who had been suspended for the same offense last week--and Andrea had both been suspended for smoking. Although we did not know it, Laurence would quit the group after today. Dolores arrived for the first time today, her first day at school in three weeks: she had been staying home because she was "sick of this place."

Today we were going to try role playing, hoping this would make it possible for the youngsters to feel more involved. We asked them each to think of some time they had been in trouble (not necessarily just at school), and to tell it to the group: who was involved, exactly what occurred, who said what, who did what, what the outcome was.

Just as Amy began, two very tall, husky black youths walked into the group room. One was Donald, another of the boys who had been interviewed and not selected for the group, and with him, Emilio, a huge fellow who reportedly had a violent temper and got into many serious fights. The two of them entered the room and just stood there, silently, side by side, at the front of the room. To me there seemed a mock-defiant "testing-out" quality to their enactment: my sense was that it seemed a test to see if or what we would do about a behavior so at odds with what any school authority would permit. Frank's perception of it was different: he felt they wanted to ask us about some problem. When he asked if this were so, they didn't reply and finally left, without articulating why they had come. We were beginning to realize that there is a vast grapevine among the delinquent subculture in Eldridge Junior High, and that news about us and our group--and apparently news that we were an odd

breed of adults who didn't mete out punishment--had spread throughout the subculture. It had begun to appear that this would add another dimension to working with a group of troubled adolescents inside a school: as if the disruptions among the group members themselves weren't enough, here one had to survive disruptions from others of the subculture who wanted either to have a look at us or to test us out, perhaps to see what it felt like to confront an adult and not be punished.

When we returned to the role playing exercise, Amy wanted to talk about a "really big" fight she had been in "with a big boy at a football game." As Amy described it, corroborated by other group members who had witnessed it, it was an astonishingly brutal battle, started when Amy became violently and explosively enraged by a seemingly inconsequential remark the boy, sitting behind her and her girlfriend at the game, had made to her. During the fierce fighting which ensued, Amy ripped his shirt off and dug her fingernails across his face until it bled and he threw her over his shoulder. When this brought a crowd of other boys to her rescue, the boy was knocked to the ground and Amy hit him in the head with "a size 14 shoe." Asked about her feelings at the time, Amy looked frightened. "I was mad."

The actual role playing exercise didn't go very far. It had been our plan to have the person who was describing an incident in which he had got into trouble role play it as it happened (in this case symbolically), with other group members taking the other parts. Then they were to reverse roles and role play it again, with the person who had got into trouble taking the part of the other significant person. In the third role play around that incident, others in the group would be invited to

suggest as many different ways as they could think of that that situation might have been handled--some other response that would not as surely lead the respondent into trouble,

Helen spontaneously declined to take a part, blurting out "Don't look at me: I ain't no bully!" (A few weeks later, Helen was arrested and taken to court on a charge of assault and battery involving a twelve-year-old boy she allegedly attacked.) Charles yelled that he thought it was "a stupid thing for a dude to be fighting a girl!" This remark began a bedlam-like involvement among the whole group about the adolescent ethics of "hitting girls."

A little later in the group Helen made a movement of her body--unnoticed by the rest of the group, who were engaged in a discussion--which Charles and Duke had perceived as sexually provocative and which had generated in them a great deal of self-conscious giggling and side slapping. Helen, who used this incident to turn the "spotlight" on her, embarked on a graphic account of her problems with boys accusing her of teasing them sexually when, in her opinion, she made no contribution to this. Some of the other girls accusingly spit out their contrary opinion, each echoing Amy's angry sentiment: "People shouldn't advertise what they don't intend to deliver!" This brought into play a heated discussion of girls who tease boys by wearing extremely short skirts and tight clothing and by suggestive posturing in school, and of the violently aggressive and hostile way in which first Duke and then the other boys insisted such girls should be dealt with. The unleashed wild eruptions of sexuality and aggression were escalating to a fever pitch when the siren sounded,



"We CAN'T stop now!" Charles hollered spontaneously at the top of his lungs as the siren blasted announcing the end of the session. The sentiment was resoundingly seconded by the others as they kept right on with their highly charged discussion. So thoroughly engaged that they were unable to disengage themselves, so involved in listening and talking to each other than they could not bear to stop, the group begged us to permit them to continue the group into the next class period.

Frank and I quickly looked at each other across the circle of caught-up youngsters, silently acknowledging our dilemma with our eyes: we did not want to force them to break at such an emotionally charged point, but we were aware that we well might be taken to task for not sending the children to their next class on time. We shared the sense of importance in communicating the implicit message that we respected their emotional needs and we decided to take the responsibility for letting them remain throughout the next class period. At the end of that second hour we left time for a discussion on the issue of length of future sessions and all agreed that it was obviously necessary with a group this size to have longer than 46 minutes per session. We came to be very sure we had made the right decision as the weeks progressed.

In that second hour, Helen, in commenting on "how guys ought to be with girls" (she had been badly beaten up, at age 13, by "older guys" she had gone out with) embarked on a long, graphic autobiographical saga of her multifaceted problems, including many extraordinarily violent fights in school, one of them involving her threatening the vice principal with a knife. She recounted in vivid detail her time "behind bars", her years on drugs--shooting heroin daily for a time, her involvements with "older

guys", getting beat up by "guys", her times in court, in reform school, in a "home", and, finally, "kicking the habit." (We had to remind ourselves that this was one of the children whose name had initially been given to us in response to our request for a list of moderately disturbed, maladjusted ninth graders.) This over-developed fifteen-year-old told these tales with an air of extreme "repentance" reminiscent of the descriptions of former alcoholics speaking out at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

Helen's mother and father (neither of them her biological parents) had recently separated. She recounted an incident in which her mother, having no money in the house for food, sent Helen to her father's apartment to get some money from him. According to Helen, her father, in response to this request, told this fifteen-year-old, junior-high-school student that if she and her mother wanted money, she should "go out and peddle your ass on the street." Helen was not the only one in the group whose father had made this kind of remark to his young daughter. Amy, almost inaudibly, and in a tone of great sadness, said,

"Oh God, does that sound familiar."

It was with an obvious sense of relief that Amy responded to our having picked up that almost-whisper and bringing her into the discussion, giving her an opportunity to speak--for the first time--of what was obviously a terribly heavy thing for her to bear: that her father had more than once told her substantially the same thing. This called forth from Beth the sad-voiced, head-down comment that her mother had called her "a tramp." (In another, later, session, Beth angrily denounced her

neighbors' children for calling her mother "a prostitute"--in Beth's perception, "just because she's divorced and remarried.")

These revelations were received as very distressing to the young adolescent boys in the group, and there was much wincing, head shaking and eye rolling from them. Danny was the most visibly upset and at one point groaned, "I don't think I should be here."

Stunned by such graphic accounts of experiences, the youngsters sat, for the only time throughout the sessions, wide-eyed and as close as they ever came to silence, for a fairly long period. By all indications, these were experiences beyond their ken. Finally, unable to contain himself longer, Charles burst in with a sudden long and elaborate cataloguing of what he described as his parents' many physical ailments--which were so many, so varied and so severe (they included six or seven "fatal illnesses") as to defy believability. Throughout Charles' account, colored by the sense of a pathetic bid for a sympathy equal to that being experienced for Helen, Helen countered each facet of Charles' tale of overwhelming woe with a "coincidental" similarity in her own life, about her parents and assorted relatives, in a tit-for-tat oneupsmanship encounter. Charles' final remark, just seconds before the final siren, was (almost whispered),

"There ain't no love in my home."

#### The Fourth Session

"I'd hit her; I don't know why. Hitting's the only thing I know,"--Amy

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Although the role playing exercise of the previous week had felt like a decided failure from the standpoint of helping the youngsters experience the perspective of "the other person" in their "troublemaking" encounters and from the standpoint of helping them begin to look at their own self-defeating coping behaviors, we still, naively, believed that it would be therapeutic if we just kept trying to make it work by helping them get personally involved in the role playing. Today we again asked the youngsters to think of some experience in which they had got into trouble and to proceed as the previous week.

In the first role play incident, volunteered excitedly by Charles, a classmate named Joey (a "goofy boy") had snatched Charles' pencil from his desk in class and walked away with it. Charles described his response:

"This boy picks the trouble: he snatched my pencil so I jumped and punched him in the nose and threw him over the desk-- and I got suspended and he didn't! The one who started it! But they didn't do nothin' to him! Goofy boy!"

Here Charles was demonstrating vividly the kind of coping behavior he employs in response to a relatively minor provocation. In his use of the word "so" ("he snatched my pencil so I jumped and punched, etc."), in his belief that it was the other child's "fault" that he, Charles, would end up being in trouble, and in his sense of injustice at the outcome, it was clear that in Charles' perception his explosive response was the appropriate response. He was sincerely puzzled and confused by the fact that the authority figures thought he deserved to be punished, for having made what he still believed was the appropriate response under the circum-



stances. Although it had been made clear to Charles that he was to be punished for this behavior, it was not made clear to him that this was an inappropriate response to this situation; no clue was offered as to an appropriate coping behavior in dealing with a situation of this kind. The erroneous assumption on the part of the school authorities meting out the punishment in this instance was that he did know an appropriate alternative response, but that he willfully chose not to employ it. We discovered that Charles did not know what would constitute an appropriate alternative response.

As punishment for having chosen to employ this kind of "unacceptable" behavior, Charles was sent home, where, as the data revealed, he had been taught, and would be reassured, that this was the appropriate response. At the end of the period of punishment, which the school presumably saw as intended to "teach him a lesson" about his unacceptable behavior, Charles was returned to the classroom with no change having been made in his storehouse of knowledge of how otherwise one might respond to such a situation; he was returned still operating on the assumption that evoked the responses he emitted in the first place--that his response was the only one appropriate in those circumstances. What had changed was that the level and direction of his suppressed anger and resentment had increased: whereas initially he had been angry only at the boy--for having snatched his pencil--he was now far more angry at the school, for having punished him for having made what he believed was the only possible response. He was easily able to mitigate his anger at the boy--he was seen as a "goofy boy" who could be credited with being "goofy" enough to snatch someone's pencil. He was completely unable to mitigate his anger at the

school: the school authorities were "adults", "grown-ups", "knowledgeable" and could thus not be dismissed as "not knowing any better."

Charles thus perceived the school authorities (in this case, the teacher who sent him to the vice principal and the vice principal who officially suspended him) as knowing that Charles' response was the appropriate response under those circumstances, and therefore, as willfully choosing to punish him. Charles was hurt, angry and confused.

Just as the school authorities had, erroneously, perceived Charles as knowing the appropriate behavior but willfully choosing instead to employ an inappropriate, unacceptable response, so Charles erroneously perceived the school authorities as knowing that their behavior toward him was incorrect, but as willfully choosing to employ this inappropriate, unacceptable response. Charles' response to this action on the part of the school authorities was identical to the school authorities' response to Charles' action: he found himself convinced that the school authorities should be "punished" for their inappropriate manner of responding to him. The school, however, is in the position of being able to legitimately and overtly deal with its belief that Charles should be punished for his inappropriate behavior. Charles had no such option. His necessarily suppressed anger at the school authorities was thus forced into becoming an ongoing resentment at the injustice he perceived himself an impotent victim of.

By itself, Charles' initial description of the incident could easily be seen as the comment of an irrational youngster. It is only after a painstaking analysis of hundreds of "small statements", made by Charles and by the other youngsters, in many different contexts, and applied to

many different situations, that the consistent theme emerges. The theme is that of willfulness and injustices. The child and the school authorities parallel each other exactly in their perceptions of the other as willfully choosing to act in a manner totally inappropriate to the situation; the injustice, as perceived by the child, derives from the unequal balance of power, which permits the school to punish Charles while he is permitted no recourse.

This theme emerged more and more clearly over the course of the sessions. It represented one of the most significant patterns threading through the school lives of all of the young adolescents in the group. It cut across the subject variables of sex, race, family make-up, amount of physical violence in the home, school academic performance.<sup>7</sup>

In the scene Charles played the other's role--of the boy who snatched the pencil--the provoker. Bernadette played the role equivalent to the one Charles had in the real situation: the person whose pencil is snatched in class. She was to attempt to respond with some other behavior which would not be guaranteed to result in suspension for the person whose pencil was snatched. When Charles first snatched her pencil, Ber-

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<sup>7</sup>It is obvious that the inherent meaning of Charles' statement could not be inferred from its initial presentation. The theme is traced back after the data has generated a hypothesis. One must become familiar with the entirety of the data before detecting common threads and then work backward to test them for goodness of fit. In presenting the material to the reader this common theme can now, however, be noted at the beginning, providing an opportunity for the account of this study to be read with a hypothesis already in mind, so that it can be checked against the data extracts as they appear. This process, in which hypotheses emerge from cumulative familiarity with the entirety of the data and are then checked for goodness of fit with sub-parts, characterizes the methodology of this form of study.



nadette did get angry and angrily demanded her pencil back from Charles, playing the taunting provoker.

But when Charles (as he had been instructed) tauntingly snarled "no!", Bernadette was able to say "OK, you can keep it. I got another one." (Bernadette, we were later to learn, did get into rather severe fights, but she seemed not as easily provoked as some of the other in the group).

With Charles still playing the role of the provoking pencil snatcher, Danny assumed the role of the one who must come up with some alternative response other than hitting. With what he described as the best way he could think of other than actually hitting, his response to having his pencil snatched by Charles was to yell "Give me my pencil or I'll knock your head off!"

Beth, who also gets into many serious fights, but also, like Bernadette, on slightly more provocation, said quietly "sometimes I get so mad I could just hit somebody but I don't think a pencil is worth getting suspended for." When Beth did meet provocation with fighting, it was, we later learned, in response to things she did believe were "worth getting suspended for", that is, they were things for which she believed hitting was the appropriate, correct response (and for which she did not believe suspension was the appropriate response on the part of the school).

Laurence, when asked to role play the situation, was very hesitant and reluctant. He finally got up to try, but stood there immobilized, "I can't. I can't act this out because you said I can't hit him." He gave up and sat down.

When we asked the group to come up with as many different ways as



they could think of to handle the situation so as not to involve hitting the other, all had vied for the chance to be the provoker except Amy: she had sat silent. When we then asked Amy to be the person getting provoked--to have her pencil snatched--she got very upset. "No! I can't do it! I'll hit him. I know I will. I can't do it. I just know I'll hit him!" She was so extremely distressed that we suggested she watch other people role play the situation to get some ideas of other ways a person might do it that didn't involve hitting, and that later she could see if she could decide to try one of them. Quietly, half to herself, Amy said "Hitting's the only thing I know."

When Andrea was asked to try, she said:

"I can't do it. I never been in that kind of situation, so how could I? I don't care if she takes my pencil. I'd be glad: it would mean I don't have to do my work."

This, as we learned throughout the sessions, was Andrea's customary defensive style: to remain uninvolved and unable to empathize, presenting a tough "why should I care?" facade.

Now we asked Charles to try role playing himself, not as he did act in the situation, but in some way which would not lead to suspension, having watched the somewhat more acceptable possibilities of other group members. We instructed the other person to really "hassle" him; to provoke him by not giving the pencil back, and to act as a child might in that situation, having snatched someone's pencil away. Charles' first response was a meek "Please give me my pencil back." When this brought a taunting "no" from Bernadette, Charles shook his head in frustration and pathetically yelled, "Teacher, make her give me my pencil back!" When the provoker

didn't let that work either, he became very excited and began to yell louder and louder, "Stop! Stop! Stop! I don't want to hit you!" It was obvious that he could think of no more ways of coping with this situation without punching and he was trying to get the message across to Bernadette.

When Bernadette responded by telling him that "hitting isn't the way to do it, man!" Charles yelled "yes, it is the way to do it--to hit the person! Because it my pencil!" Charles conceded that that route is guaranteed to get him suspended but he nevertheless found it hard to believe that hitting is not the right way under that circumstance. (Like Beth, Bernadette too encountered many provoking instances throughout her Eldridge career where she did believe that hitting was the only appropriate response. On those occasions she was violent,)

After all had tried it, with varying degrees of success, at least some of them showing some ways that one could do this (at least in a role playing situation) that did not involve hitting, we tried again to get Amy to try. Her reply was

"I'd hit her. If I couldn't hit her I'd have to walk out.  
But I'd hit her. I don't know why."

Although she shook her head Amy seemed to be communicating that she wanted an opportunity to try it, if she could be sure it was safe; if she could be sure we understood that she didn't find this easy. She agreed to try and walked up and sat in the role playing seat in the front of the group. To our dismay, we discovered too late that suddenly no one was willing to be the hassler, the one to snatch Amy's pencil. Each was

afraid to trust Amy, the most petite and least strong-appearing youngster in the group.

After all that it had taken her to bring herself to sit in the seat to try the role playing, we felt it would be destructive to her self image if no one could trust her ability to control her impulsive behavior. In an effort to help her gain some degree of trust of herself, it seemed that one of us would have to volunteer to play the role of the provoker for Amy and I took on the role, unaware of what I was getting into.

When I first provoked her by snatching her pencil, she sat in her chair, her cheeks flushing, obviously trying for control. Using the same words that the other youngsters had used in their descriptions of how one is provoked in the corridors of Eldridge Junior High, I played the classmate provoker. There was a moment of heavy silence. The muscles of Amy's neck visibly tightened. Suddenly she leaped out of the chair, totally beyond control. Before I could even duck, Amy slugged me, as if by reflex. (I had the fleeting sensation that she was fighting as if for her life.) She hit me hard, in the stomach--harder than I had ever been hit in my life, knocking me against the wall, and knocking the breath out of me.

I realized even as I leaned up against the wall doubled over in pain that I had about five seconds to come up in a hurry with some kind of "therapeutic" response, for Amy and for all of the group members. None of my clinical training had ever suggested what might constitute an appropriate response to getting punched hard in the stomach by a violent adolescent. When I straightened up, every child in the room sat wide-eyed, holding their breath in tense anticipation of what my response

could be to getting slugged. It flashed through my mind that not one of them had ever seen anger or any kind of impulsiveness responded to in any other way but retaliatory; their parents beat them for even minor offenses; their peers punched out even when accidentally bumped into; the school authorities suspended their right even to come inside the building with other children, for even a "justified" hitting. If Amy had done that to a teacher, I knew, as she did, that she would be expelled permanently from school. Their words tumbled through my mind: "Hitting's the only thing I know"; "I can't act this out if I can't hit him!"; "It is the way to do, to hit the person." And then I remembered that Amy had been willing to trust me with her violent impulsiveness, and that it was quite probably the first time she had allowed herself to trust an adult in a long time. She had trusted me by warning me that she had no way to be sure that she wouldn't hit a person who provoked her, even when it was part of a "game."

I took a deep breath to dispel the pain in my stomach and I smiled, to assure her and the group that I had not forgotten that it was only a role playing situation; that I had not forgotten that I had asked Amy to trust my ability to accept the consequences of putting her in a role playing situation in which she was afraid of her response tendencies. And I admitted that her response had stunned me for a minute.

"OK, Amy," I said, "now let's try it again, and this time why not take a minute to try to get the response that you would like to make in your head and let me know when you're ready," I said in a friendly tone. There was a huge sigh of relief around the room as the tension lowered.

By this time, I really didn't feel like going through this again,



but I felt concerned that if I gave up at that point and didn't give her another chance, I would in effect be saying that I didn't think Amy could ever manage such a situation without hitting. I was also trusting somewhat to luck, hoping that having once yielded to her impulsiveness, and having been so embarrassed, as she was, at hitting me, that this time the odds would be in favor of her not hitting.

This time Amy held on for a minute or two, and then "pow!", she spontaneously lunged forward in a swinging punch again. This time she caught herself halfway through and managed to deflect much of the swing, and I was on guard enough this time to duck fast, so that I missed getting hit very hard. We thought it was time to go on to another kind of role playing situation.

The school authorities regularly punish Amy for this kind of behavior. Their assumption is that Amy is, of course, capable of another response but that she willfully chooses not to employ it. Amy has several times watched her father attack the policemen who were called to quell his extremes of violence. She lives in real terror of his brutal, explosive beatings. As her punishment for this kind of behavior, the schools suspends Amy and sends her home, so that there she may be taught about her unacceptable mode of response.

Beth, relieved by Amy's having shared this "bad" behavior of hers with us and by learning that we could accept it, spilled out words in a rush describing a violent experience of hers, which continues to distress her:

I got in a fight with this girl. She just came up to me and said, 'Your mother's a prostitute' and she slapped me in the

face. I just grabbed her and started punching her hard and Mr. G (the vice principal) came up and we both got kicked out."

Sent home as punishment for her "inappropriate" behavior, Beth's father greeted the news of her most recent suspension--at the dinner table--with a snarled "I should get up and kick the shit out of you! I should come over there and kick your ass!" The next time she "kicks the ass" of a child who seriously provokes her in school, she will again be sent home to her parents, to teach her a lesson about appropriate responses. Beth's sharing paved the way for the timid-seeming, grinning, friendly Bernadette:

"I have a quick temper and this girl hit me and blamed it on my friends. She kicked my butt and called my mother a bitch and I was going to kill her and Mr. G and Mr. B. and Mr. W (the two vice principals and the principal) had to hold me down. We both got kicked out." (As with everything Bernadette said, there were words and sentences too unclearly articulated to be understood, even when we asked her to repeat them twice.)

Bernadette described the difference between her mother and her stepfather on one occasion by saying that her mother didn't believe in whipping. When she is sent home from school for this kind of unacceptable behavior, it is her father who teaches her a lesson.

In turn, and often tumbling all over each other in their spillings out need, Sammy, Amy, Beth, Bernadette, Dolores, Charles, Helen, Danny, and Andrea all talked of their "hot tempers." All protested loudly that having a hot temper doesn't bother them except Amy and Andrea, who are very much aware that they are afraid of their own violence and that of their fathers. The paradoxical communications they receive about fighting at home, and the paradoxical ways they themselves feel about violence in

themselves is discussed in a later section.

Since Andrea had spoken sneeringly of the pencil-snatching role play situations as "stupid," because she could not "imagine" herself in that situation, never having been in it, we suggested that Andrea, Beth and Amy try role playing a scene from what Frank and I had come to call the "Sally Ann Saga."

The story of Sally Ann was one repeatedly referred to by Andrea and the others throughout the sessions. Sally Ann was a small, quiet, passive girl at Eldridge Junior High who baffled the three girls in our group who were in classes with her, because she never fought back and never said anything when harassed, not even when hit. For this reason, according to Andrea, she and Beth and Amy have, for three years, taken "delight", regularly, in taunting Sally Ann. A small part of the saga goes like this:

"Sally Ann is this girl. We bother her all the time."

"What does she do?"

"Nothing,"

"We start yelling at her."

"We love to watch her get mad."

"She's real quiet. Real funny."

"We follow her around. And we take her pocket book, When she tries to get it back, we laugh at her. She's goofy."

"We pull her hair. We do stuff to get her mad. But she don't do nothin'. She don't say nothin'."

"If she's gonna let people do that to her and not say nothin' she must be goofy, not to hit people if they say things to her,"

--Andrea, Amy and Beth

It was our naive belief that by this means, by Andrea's playing the part of Sally Ann, and with Amy and Beth playing themselves self-consciously, they might come to have some sense of the experience of the other person, to whom they are cruel. We had been struck by the contrast between their feeling such a keen awareness of their perception of many situations in which others provoke them and how distressing this is to them, and their total lack of awareness of the fact that with Sally Ann they are doing that which they speak so derogatorily about in others.

They tried but all three found themselves totally unable to play the role of Sally Ann. "How can I play it?" "What is there to do? She don't do nothin'," Andrea whined. After several abortive tries, they conceded it was impossible to role play Sally Ann and we had to give up the effort. They were unable to understand her not "getting mad" at them: they could see no connection whatever between their fear, anger and dismay at getting "beaten up" or called names and what Sally Ann might feel at being tormented physically and verbally, nor with the outraged protests of the group as a whole that the "kids in this school" (meaning, in their perspective, not them) "think they so tough" that they "just walk up to you and punch you, for no reason!"

We attempted one last role playing situation. In this one Beth described the situation in which she "got into trouble" with her parents when she was sent home from school for having been caught smoking in school. Because what we learned from this role play melds so isomorphically with data from later sessions, its impact will more readily be seen within the context of a later section.

By the time the fourth session ended we had come to believe that



while we could learn a great deal about the children's coping mechanisms and response tendencies through this medium, it did not seem the most valuable means to enable the group to talk about their difficulties in living in a way meaningful to them.

### Learning from Experience

In theory the idea of role playing seems a good one. In a group of troubled young adolescents, however, we learned that the role playing situations, involving as they do only some few of the group as participants, forced the rest to sit passively as audience. Asking this group of youngsters to sit passively was asking for trouble. Personal feelings evoked by the situation could not be expressed spontaneously, at the moment, and it was in some measure this that produced the appearance of boredom on the part of most of the "audience", and evoked acting out by some.

It had become increasingly obvious that what these youngsters needed to do was to talk: to have us and the others listen to them and respond to them. They could not tolerate sitting and having to listen to others engaged in a sustained exclusive experience, which, for the duration of a given role play, they were constrained to do. Because that was too difficult for them, some sat detached and tense, while others clowned, or hit each other, giggled, talked, fidgeted and called out personal references the scenes evoked, interrupting the train of thought or feeling of the role players.

They also seemed, in varying degrees, to have considerable difficulty in empathizing with the experiences of another, at least through that

means. Some were obviously not able to do this at all. It became clear that what they needed was a group situation in which each could be free to contribute his thoughts and feelings on a topic important to him, and, if the feeling was strong or urgent enough, to digress.

Beginning with the fifth session this became the format of the sessions. Talk they did, and digress they did. They also still clowned, laughed, giggled, poked, prodded, yelled, cursed, lost their tempers, teased; and two children wept. In these conjoint active group discussions, although there was still an enormous amount of boisterous impulsive behavior, physical and verbal, their attention was always engaged: the detachment and the extra-situational "carrying on" diminished markedly. This would seem to have implications for the classroom teaching for youngsters of this age who infuriate teachers by not paying attention in the passive audience role demanded of them in classroom lecture and demonstration formats.

It would be neither possible nor meaningful to attempt any kind of description of all of the sessions. The aim in the next section will be to present material extracted into the several categories I chose to investigate.

## PART II

## THE CHILDREN SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES: THEIR PERCEPTIONS

"Research on children will not begin paying off until psychologists reckon with the actual conditions in which children live and develop."

--Urie Bronfenbrenner  
Address to the American Orthopsychiatric Association; March, 1975.

"The absence of reports from children about children is a striking deficiency in current survey research on the quality of life in America. It is time to let American children speak for themselves in order to find out what they are thinking."

--Orville Brim,  
Presidential Address to the American Orthopsychiatric Association;  
March, 1975.

## C H A P T E R 4

THE IMPACT OF PRECEPTIONS OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY INFLUENCES  
ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

"...if you get into a fight and you can't beat the person, pick up something and knock his head off."

--Charles

\* \* \* \* \*

Much of this and following sections will be presented through the medium of letting the children speak for themselves. Verbatim quotations will often give the appearance of having been emitted sequentially. While there will be segments in which one child's comment is in response to the comment of one or more others during a particular session, just as often many or all of the words of the children were in fact spoken (or yelled, or whispered) in very different contexts, in sessions weeks apart. The fact that they so often possess sufficient similarity to give the appearance of having derived from a single contextual situation dramatically evidences how pervasive these influences are across subjects and across situations.

Aggressive behavior is one of the most predominant difficulties in living experienced by the members of the group. Fighting with other youngsters, for the most part in school but in many instances outside of school as well, was the most frequent behavior which "got them into trouble."

One of the most rigidly enforced regulations of Vernon M. Eldridge Junior High School is the one forbidding fighting. More children in the



group were punished by being suspended from school for fighting during the course of our group session than for any other behavior. One group member--a friendly, pleasant-appearing fifteen-year-old white girl--was arraigned in court on a charge of assault and battery during our time with the group. Fighting seemed equally a primary factor in their lives at home, or outside the home and school, and was the source of as much difficulty as at school.

#### School Environmental Forces Related to Aggressive Behavior

It was the consensus of the group that it is "impossible to keep from getting in fights at Eldridge." While it was their belief that this was generalizable across the entire school population, that is, they believed that it is impossible--for anyone--to keep from getting into fights at Eldridge, many of the youngsters at this school go through their three years of junior high school there without getting into trouble for fighting. Thus, while the youngsters in our study perceived their fighting as a function of some variable attributable to Eldridge Junior High School, it is evident that even if this behavior is in part a function of "the school", there would have to be some other factor influencing this effect. Nevertheless, it is significant that all of the youngsters in the group, all of whom get into trouble for fighting (the one partial exception was one girl who does not technically get into trouble by fighting, but is more troubled by fighting behavior than other members of the group) perceive Eldridge Junior High School as a place where it is impossible to keep from getting into fights.

Sammy, absent the week before because he had been suspended for fighting, replied to our asking about the fight for which he had got into trouble:

"I bumped into him accidentally and he called me 'a swear.' I just pushed him and then he hit me. Mr. G<sup>8</sup> broke it up. He (Mr. G) didn't talk to me. You gotta write it down, [Your version of what happened] And we both got kicked out."

Beth: "I got beat up by this girl. I wouldn't have hit her but she hit me first, I didn't expect it. I pushed her a few times and he sent me down to the office. He [Mr. G] just told me to write down what happened, and she had to write down what happened. He read them and we got kicked out and sent home."

The youngsters have no idea why it is that they are never permitted to verbalize what they believe is the reason for their having been fighting to any of the school authorities. They are puzzled by the fact that no adult will permit them to talk about it, and that no one talks to them about it. They do not understand why it is that they are forced to write down their version of what happened leading up to the fight. They are deeply troubled, resentful and frustrated by the fact that they are told they are to "have a chance to tell their version of what happened" in writing down the details of the incident but that no comment is ever made, nor is there any discussion of what they have written. All members of the group agreed with Beth's remark: "It's dumb to have to write it down, because nobody cares what you write. As soon as it's written, you get sent home no matter what you wrote. It never makes any difference what you write so why make you do it as if to pretend that they care who started it when they don't."

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<sup>8</sup>Mr. G is a pseudonym for one of the vice principals.

We asked the group what the school authorities prescribe or suggest as the alternative to fighting when one is hit or harassed by another student.

Sammy (angry): "Don't fight back or you'll get kicked out. But I ain't gonna stand there and get punched around," (Getting "punched around" at home by his father, we later learned, was the primary source of pain, fear, frustration and despair in Sammy's life.)

Beth (in an extremely sarcastic, mimicking high-pitched tone): "I guess you're supposed to say 'Well, I'm tellin'.'" (This in obvious derision of the school for expecting an alternative response perceived by them as so patently absurd that only "an idiot" would fail to sneer at it.)

Fighting with others was always reported as having been "started" by the other. However unlikely this seems, the youngsters were unanimously agreed in their anger about how aggressive and hostile so many of the other students at Eldridge are, and how irritating they find it that others are so "quick to pick a fight." None of the members of the group perceive themselves as belonging in either of those categories: in most instances it is the members of the group who, although regarded as "tough" by the school authorities, feel threatened and intimidated by the "tough kids" in the school.

Almost all, if not all, of the many fights reported in the group were witnessed by at least one other member of the group, and/or the other person involved in the fight was known to the other members of the group as, in their judgment, a person who regularly starts fights. In this, as in other aspects of environmental influences on their behavior, what was reported by one member was most often consensually validated by other members, even though they were by no means all members of the same

peer cohort. Perceptions of school and family environmental forces influencing aggressive behavior in the school were vouched for by others in the group. All participants emphatically concurred that here at Eldridge the prevailing climate is as Charles described it:

"They walk up to you and push you and start calling you names: the dudes think they 'bad' and knock you on the ground."

Dolores: "Yeah. They knock you over and then you got a fight."

In the halls it is a common experience to see one child seemingly spontaneously hit another. In many instances I personally observed youngsters bumping forcibly into one another as a function of the large numbers of youngsters filling the corridors at the periodic intervals when they are required to pass from one part of the building to another. Recalling the experience of having been forcefully almost knocked down, unintentionally, by the rowdiness of a small group of boys as I walked in the corridor, it was not difficult to imagine many of the youngsters in the group (most of whom presumably associate getting "hit" with punishment at home) becoming instantaneously defensive and inferring that the other person purposely bumped into them.

Beth and Sammy each talked about incidents where they bumped into other students accidentally in the corridor and where this resulted in a serious fight and in their subsequent suspension. All in the group agreed that this was the rule and not the exception: that this was an everyday occurrence at Eldridge. Every member of the group except Andrea reported getting into countless fights in school and being suspended for being in these fights, despite their belief that they were blameless and



had not wanted to get into the fight. (Andrea got into trouble more often than any other group member for smoking in school.)

So far, we have looked at the children's perceptions of that part of the school environment which they themselves believe to be an influence on their aggressive behaviors which get them into trouble; which cause them to be labelled as "trouble makers," and as "bad kids." As they saw it, one is continually provoked by other youngsters in the school. Most of them respond to this provocation by becoming involved in a physical fight, often extremely violent, with the other youngster. Regardless of their intention, and/or their belief about who started the fight, they are then summarily punished, invariably by being suspended. They perceived the school as demanding that they not hit other youngsters, even if struck first by another. Yet they also saw the school authorities, who repeatedly punished them for physical aggression, as providing no clear, nor effective means nor suggestions for how to cope with this provocation in any other way than overt physical aggression. They themselves viewed those who simply passively receive provocation without any overt response as "goofy", and as likely, for that very reason, to get provoked even more than those who do strike back. In other words, it was their consensual perception that the school influence was such that one gets punished--by the school authorities--for fighting, but one gets punished also, for not fighting--by peers. The school as they perceive it (usually presented as a "they", and, sometimes, embodied as a "he", but always as a single entity), is inconsistent in punishing a child for something outside his control and for providing no information regarding viable alternative coping mechanisms. Since the children believe that there are

no alternative coping mechanisms, they are confused and infuriated at being punished for this behavior. Reportedly, none of them enjoyed fighting, nor wanted to fight. All but Duke preferred not to fight. They spoke of fighting with loathing and fear.

### Perceptions of Family Environmental Forces Related to Aggressive Behavior

Let's turn now to the influence of their families on this aspect of the behavior of these youngsters. When the child is suspended from school, the family is forced to become directly involved. Some of the following comments are extracted from a session in which the group was expressing feelings about getting suspended for fighting and discussing their parents' reactions to their having been suspended for fighting at school. Others are extracted from various other contexts and other sessions:

Dolores: [when her brother was sent home as punishment for fighting in school]--My father he get mad and say 'My boy better hit somebody: I'm not going to have them [sic] be a faggot!' Sometime he say he going to get a gun and teach them to shoot it."

"What kinds of things does he think your brothers should hit people for?"

"Talking about them. Or if they [the others] be hitting on him [on her brother]. He says 'Reason with them first and then, if they still keep lying about them [her brothers], go up and knock them in the head!'"

Dolores, a very intelligent-seeming, concerned youngster, recited this comment in a completely matter-of-fact manner. It was obvious that she was totally unaware that anyone might think of this as anything than reasonable. She herself sees it as completely reasonable; not as any-

thing she would need to be defensive about.

Charles: My mother and father send me into a fight. Say I be scared and if [I] be fighting and I get scared and takes off and runs. When I get home, I'm going to have to run from home! I been taught to defend myself! When I get suspended for fighting, my mother just says (not in an angry tone) 'Put on old clothes, start painting, washing the dishes. . . .' She minds when I get suspended [for fighting: however, since they demand that he fight, apparently what they 'mind' is Charles' having been caught fighting, for it is the getting suspended they are reported as 'minding', not the fighting]. "She minds but when I get suspended, I be glad, cuz this place is just like a prison!"

Later, Charles said, "My mother and father say, 'if you get into a fight and you can't beat the person, pick up something and knock his head off.'"

The message from his parents, in direct contradiction to the message from the school, appears to be: "Defend yourself against provocation by physical retaliation, and, in defending yourself, resort to extreme violence and weapons." In effect, he is being told by his parents that their demands are that he disregard the school's regulation against fighting. Paradoxically, he is simultaneously being told not to get suspended for fighting in school.

Bernadette: "My mother's that way too. My father said if I be running away from a fight or an argument, he going to come after me."

As with Dolores, Charles and Bernadette were oblivious to the idea that there might be anything awry in their parents' suggestion that the commonly accepted coping mechanism in a fight is to pick up something to use as a weapon and knock the other person's head off.

Four group members commented directly on their parents' explicit

messages about fighting in school, and all reported the same explicit message. The children who did not describe their parents as having communicated this explicit message, said that their parents never talked to them and that their parents "only yell[ed] or hassle[d]" them. All but one reported parental behaviors from which one could construe repeated implicit robust communications that aggression was the only coping mechanism for most situations. For the parents themselves physical aggression seemed to be the response of choice when provoked--either by another or by their children.

The following excerpts illustrating this point are extracted from within many widely varying topics of discussion, spanning many sessions:

Amy: "They took my father down to the police station in his shorts. I remember that he was drinking. He was drunk. He knew they were following him. He ran in, took off his clothes and jumped in bed in his shorts. The cops came in with a billy club. They beat the crap out of him. We were little kids but I still remember it. They brought him down in his shorts. I was about seven."

Beth: "I woulda started belting the police."

Amy: "That's what he was doing. That's why they were hitting him with billy clubs. They didn't swing first: he did,"

Beth: "So? Four on one? Huh! That's no fair!"

Amy: "He hit first. They wouldn't have beat him up if he wouldn't of hit them. He got beat up two years ago too. He broke our door down. He and my mother were having a fight and we went to stay at my mother's friend's house, one house away. My father was trying to break into her house, to get my mother. My mother called the cops and they chased him and the cars were out in front and he just ran to our front door and he busted down the door. And he was hitting the cops and they brought him down. He always throws the first punch so it's his own fault."

On another, earlier, occasion Amy, in the midst of talking about her



violent temper and her extreme difficulty in impulse control, following the role playing incident in which she struck me, spoke of her fighting and her parents' response, at home:

"I'm the oldest and my father says 'set an example,' and my mother kills me if I hit my brother and sister. My little brother's real obnoxious. My sister is a snot. The only one I get along with at all is my little brother who's four. I hit my eleven-year-old brother the most. I used to take the telephone and throw it at my mother. I beat up my little brother a lot." [These last two sentences were said in a much quieter, subdued manner, with a sense of self-reflectiveness rather than spitting out heated feelings, which is the way Amy usually speaks of her parents.]

I got the impression that for the first time Amy was articulating to herself that there is an ongoing pattern to her behavior and that this realization filled her with a sense of sadness and despair.

Sammy, [very excited but controlled]: "All my old man got to do is find out, he'll kill me. He already said it. He said if I get in trouble once more, he'll kill me. He said he'll put me in the hospital and then when I get outta there he said he'll send me to reform school. He said so, so if I get in trouble again I'm leavin'."

Amy: "You should see how his father is; the stuff he does!"

Helen: "His mother goes along with it!"

Amy: "I get the same thing."

Sammy: "For fighting he don't do nothin' to me, but for this [stealin'], he'll kill me. I know he will. . . . Really hittin' me: throwin' me a mile!"

Amy: "Hit him back!"

Sammy: "Are you kiddin'? He means killin' me! Beating me to death! Smashing my head open, throwing me against the wall. I know that's what he'll do this time. He already said so. He said if you ever take anything just leave: Don't come to the house."

Sammy: "Hit--that's all he ever does, for every little thing! They [parents] should just talk to you, instead of hittin' you all the time."

Amy: "My mother tells my father he's crazy, because he's got too much of a temper. He throws a fit if he can't find his socks, even."

Andrea: "Your father is a lot like mine."

Amy: "He gets real mad about stupid things, like if we drink water with our meals, instead of milk, he'll get real, real mad!"

Charles: "I can't drink warm milk but if I put ice in my milk he [my father] will yell and split my head open."

Charles: "My mother had to get a cop because of they fight. [sic] When my father get mad he hurt people. Like he say you go to bed at 9:30 and my mother says you go to bed at 10. When you get up in the morning he hits you. With a seven strap belt."

Bernadette: "His [Charles'] mother hit his father. There was a whole crowd watching the fight and . . ."

Charles: "My mother was hitting my father: pow! She was first trying to hit my brother. There was all this yellin' and fightin' and the cops had to break it up. My father he swear!"

Beth: [having just been sent home for smoking] "I got thrown out of school. . . for smoking. My father said, 'I should get up and kick your ass! I should get up and kick the shit out of you!'"

Sammy: "That's my father."

In another context, while the group was discussing the fact that they are not permitted to discuss their parents' reactions, nor to disagree:

Beth: "You can't argue with my father."

"What would happen if you did?"

Beth: "I would get smacked!"

Sammy: "My father would kill me, murder me."

Amy: "I argue with my father really well."

Beth: "My father would just hit me!"

Amy: "Mine too, but I run and climb out my window."

Bernadette: "My father he don't hit me, but he kill my brother."

Dolores: "My father too. He kill my brother, switches him. But he'll give me money and stuff. If he [her brother] forgets to take out the trash he'll go up and pow!, and swears at him."

"Why does he hit your brother and not you?"

Dolores: "Because I'm a girl. He believes in girls should be lady-like; that they shouldn't go to work."

Charles: "When my mother said we could go to bed at 10 he yelled, 'Who's the boss around this damn house?' and hit us with his seven-strap rawhide belt."

David: "My father hits me with a belt buckle. He really kills you. For anything. He chases me down the street and if he catches me, I'm dead."

Amy: "When my father hits me it only makes me resent him more and just makes me do it more [the behavior for which he is presumably hitting her]. I am as stubborn as anything when it comes to me and him fighting. I just get petrified. I used to run and lock my door whenever he came home. Now I am wise to him."

Helen: "Parents should realize that when they hit kids it makes them go out and do it twice as bad."

Amy: "Yeah. I know I do." [A chorus of "yeah" went around the room.]

Sammy: "What they should do is just talk to you. My father don't talk. They should either hit you once or talk to you. You know, just hit you once if they got to hit you, but he does everything: hit me over and over and ground me and don't talk to me. Just have him talk and don't hit me."

This last sentence was uttered half to himself, in a manner that seemed

as if Sammy were sending a prayer out into the atmosphere.

"Did you ever express that wish to him?"

Sammy: "No. I ain't gonna talk to him. You can't talk to my father."

Andrea: "My father used to hit me with a belt. My mother left and when she came back he never hit me with the belt since. She was gone for about a month, I guess. She left us with him. She left because he used to just keep on hitting with the belt and for weeks I used to have marks all over my face and body. But he always apologizes when he's done."

Beth: "But then it's too late. It's done."

One very interesting interchange came about during a session in which Sammy was close to panic on having just learned that detectives were in the school office right then during the session. According to Helen, they were there investigating the theft of a bottle of Scotch from a liquor store. While the school was unaware of this facet of Sammy's behavior, it turned out that the wide extent of Sammy's shoplifting behavior was apparently well known to many in the white delinquent subculture in the school. Helen was able to identify that it was Sammy they were looking for simply from overhearing the details of the kind of theft. Sammy became literally terrified on the spot. What he was afraid of was the violent beatings he would presumably receive from his father, who, according to Sammy, had told him that the next time he got in trouble for stealing, he would "put him in the hospital."

Sammy confidently believed that his father indeed would "split his head open," and injure him to the extent that he would have to go to a hospital. In the course of the group discussion with Sammy, it became clear that he had known all along that if he were to steal, getting



caught would unquestionably lead to what he perceived as being physically "destroyed", maimed and crippled. Now that it appeared that he had been "caught", he was unable to control his fear of his father's cruelty. He repeated many times over that the reason he knew for sure that this is what his father would do in this instance was that his father had explicitly told him so in detail. In addition, he said, his father had meted out this kind of punishment on every one of the many occasions he had been caught in the past, for lesser, but similar offenses. There was much one could learn from this long, rich account of Sammy's, and the responses to him of the others. However, one of the messages that was repeatedly evidenced, explicitly, throughout the session, was that neither the beatings Sammy's father had punished him with in the past, nor Sammy's great fear of these beatings, nor his knowledge that a severe beating would be the consequence of stealing, deterred Sammy from stealing.

This brought up a general discussion among the group members about how "stupid" of parents it is to use hitting for a punishment; that it should be so obvious to parents that "hitting is dumb"; "hitting kids is dumb"; "hitting don't make anybody stop nothing": it only makes them go out and do it twice as bad"; etc. This comment, restated in many ways over and over again, echoes the sentiment of every group member.

This highly charged discussion of the serious trouble that Sammy was in, and our acceptance of his behavior, spurred Andrea into revealing her most traumatic experience: having been "busted" for shop lifting at age 14, searched, finger printed, photographed for a "mug shot," etc. As if detached, she recounted in vivid detail her seven years of "professional" shop lifting--from age seven to age fourteen--in which she would steal

ten items of clothing at a time from a store and sell them outside. She did not speak boastfully at all of her shoplifting expertise but somehow plaintively. Others spoke then of their widespread stealing. All but Duke spoke very soberly: although none spoke of their stealing penitently, all the others, like Andrea, talked of this not as something they were proud of, nor as something they were ashamed of, but rather with a matter-of-fact-ness. They seemed to be saying, soberly: this is the way it is with me, but I'm not sure I like it this way.

Although this self-disclosure produced in most of the youngsters a reciprocal self-disclosing, of their large scale shoplifting and theft behaviors, Duke, who readily disclosed, in a jocular manner, that he stole gum, life savers and pieces of pie from the school cafeteria, apparently became upset by the disclosures of serious thievery. Suddenly he forcibly interjected into the ongoing discussion comments on how he intends to deal with his children when they misbehave:

Duke: "I know what I'm going to do to my son when I have one: I'm going to tell him to stand up and close his eyes and I am going to punch him right in the stomach. One punch, that's it! Pow! But when he gets kicked out of school I am not going to touch him cuz I know that I got kicked out of school too. But he steal something, something real bad, I am going to tear him up."

The others commented on what they would and would not permit their children to do when they grow up. Then it was pointed out to Duke that:

"Duke, you said you would punch your kids, but Sammy said his father does that, and it doesn't stop him."

Duke: "Well, it will stop mine. I know it. I know it would."

There seems to be a widespread assumption that parents of children in the lower socioeconomic groups use physical abuse on the children as a result of current economic and other stresses in their ongoing environment. Duke's thought-out plan, which even at age fifteen seems to him to be the one appropriate response to employ in dealing with one's children's unacceptable behavior, would seem to imply that there is a far more complicated mechanism operating in the perpetuation of the paradoxical child rearing practices among some members of society.

Even when dramatically exposed on all sides to the total ineffectiveness of physical punishment in changing unacceptable behaviors, the adolescents in this group--like their parents before them--plan to perpetuate this paradox (the punishment that is ineffective with me will be effective for my child). Additionally, they plan to perpetuate the further paradox which seems to so influence the lives of these troubled youngsters: as parents they will uphold the demands and expectations of society for some unacceptable behaviors, e.g., stealing, but will teach their children to defy the demands and expectations regarding some other unacceptable behaviors, e.g., fighting, "cussing the teacher out", etc.

There is no evidence of any single personological trait or characteristic which can be seen as a commonality among the youngsters. One blatant commonality that appears to pervade across persons and across situations is embedded in the implicit and explicit communications emitted by their parents with regard to physical aggression, the implicit and explicit communications emitted by the school with regard to physical aggression, and the interaction between these two sets of communications.

While we were interested in specific aspects of the troubled behav-

ior patterns of these junior high youngsters who are "always in trouble," we were particularly interested in the phenomenon of "always being in trouble" as a molar behavior pervading their experience. My aim was to attempt to find clues to an understanding of those factors which might be in some measure inhibiting them in conforming to the demands and expectations of the junior high school. Inasmuch as the behaviors for which they are constantly getting into trouble extend beyond simply physical aggression, it would seem important to look at those other behaviors for which they are repeatedly "in need of punishment" by the school. Having found a commonality across persons and across situations associated with physical aggression, I attempted to learn whether this same communicational interaction pattern might extend across other kinds of "disturbed" behavior.

The behavior which accounted for the second highest number of punishments of suspension from school among the members of the group was being caught smoking on the school property. The following section will concentrate on their getting into trouble for smoking.



## C H A P T E R 5

THE IMPACT OF PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY INFLUENCES  
ON PROHIBITED SMOKING

"Somebody who is a serious smoker gets kicked out a lot. I've been in this school four years and I've been kicked out fifteen times."

--Andrea

\* \* \* \* \*

While perceiving fighting and physical aggression as something they were severely and unfairly punished for, at no time did any youngster in the group speak against the legitimacy of the regulation against fighting. The contrary was true. In a much later session one of the children voiced the opinion that life at the school could be improved by doing away with all the rules. This suggestion generated much anxiety, centering around the insistence that without rules forbidding fighting, physical aggression and violence would erupt on a massive scale:

"People would be fightin'! People would be dead!"

"People would be dying all over the place. Right off the bat! Everybody would be hitting!"

"Somebody would get hit in the head if there weren't no rules!"

"They would be telling the teacher to kiss your you-know-what!"

"There would have to be some rules to go by: everybody would be running crazy!"

A large proportion of the discussions touching on being punished for smoking centered around the issue of the legitimacy of the regulation itself. The youngsters were unanimous in their agreement that they were

unable to perceive any "sense" in this rule at all. All agreed that, if the regulation prohibiting smoking were abolished, students in general (not just themselves) would "get in trouble" and "get kicked out" many fewer times and that a major source of their resentment and anger at the school would be removed. They did not conceptualize any such resolution to the problem of being punished for fighting: with physical aggression, removal of the regulation would not remove the problem but would, they believed, replace it with a more serious problem. This realization did not in any way diminish the anger, frustration and confusion experienced in their efforts to assimilate the experience of being punished for fighting. With fighting they perceived being punished for not meeting the demands of this regulation as "stupid", "dumb" and "unfair." With regard to punishment for smoking, they perceived the regulation itself as "stupid" and "dumb"--and "unfair."

Some excerpts follow which speak first to the youngster's perceptions of the influences of the school's rule against smoking and its ramifications:

All: "If you smoke, even if you got your parents' permission you get kicked out,"

Andrea: "Somebody who is a serious smoker gets kicked out a lot. I've been in this school four years and I've been kicked out fifteen times for smoking." (Andrea said this not with braggadocio but rather with a tone of whining futility.)

A repeated message derived from the youngsters' words was that they themselves see no connection whatever with punishment and the idea of punishment influencing, changing, extinguishing or lessening the behavior for which the punishment is meted out.

An off-repeated message centered around the ways the school was perceived as not being honest in its dealings. Their perception of one of the school's messages about smoking is an example of this:

Bernadette: "They say the rule is no smoking in a public building: that that's why we can't smoke. That's why we get kicked out if we smoke, but the teachers, they smoke here in this public building" [spoken angrily].

Amy: "I know: it makes me mad!"

Charles: "The teachers are treated different. They have their own special bathroom and they can smoke in it. We get kicked out for smoking."

Sammy: "Yeah, it ain't fair."

Dolores: "They don't do stuff fair in this school!"

This theme--that the school has a regulation against smoking and that the reason for this regulation is that it is against the law to smoke in a public building; that they, the students, get punished by being suspended from school for breaking this regulation, i.e., violating this law which states that it is "against the law for anyone to smoke in a public building," and that the teachers and vice principals are somehow permitted to violate this law with equanimity, was repeated dozens of times throughout the sessions. The youngsters feel violated by the inconsistencies in their perception of the school's communications, which represent to them a lack of integrity on the part of the school.

The family influences on smoking behavior demonstrated a clear patterning. The following excerpts are extracted from many sessions:

Charles: "My mother gave me permission to smoke; then she took it back."

Beth: "They always do that" [spoken contemptuously, a tone Beth employed very often when speaking about communications of her parents and the school authorities]. "She gave it to me too and then took it back."

Andrea: "My father thinks it's stupid that they kick you out for smoking. He gets mad all right but not for the smoking, just for the getting kicked out. He doesn't get mad for the smoking but he does for the getting kicked out for smoking."

Beth: "They [her parents] both know I smoke. They don't like it but what can they do? They just got to live with it. My father wasn't upset about it really."

Charles: "I smoke all over the house. My mother she won't hit me for it but my father will."

Andrea: "My father gets mad because I get kicked out but not because I smoke in school. He says they should let us smoke at school. What he gets mad about is when I get kicked out, I just leave him a note when I get kicked out and run upstairs and lock my door" [against her father's violent reaction upon learning that she had been suspended from school].

Beth: "My father grounded me. He made me eat a cigarette but I still smoke. He made me smoke it in front of him but it don't make me stop."

Charles: "My father made my brother smoke a whole pack of cigarettes in front of him and my brother got sick. He made my sister eat a whole pack of cigarettes."

Here we saw one of the few alternative coping mechanisms other than physical or verbal aggression toward the child: in these instances where hitting had not brought about the desired behavior, the parents had resorted to making the child ill. Andrea's father used a different tactic:

Andrea: "My father just laughs. He buys my cigarettes but he just laughs when I smoke. But he don't laugh when I get kicked out for smoking."

Andrea had been suspended from school far more often than any other group member for smoking. However destructive the parents' behavior of



forcing the child to eat cigarettes until he becomes ill, even this appeared to be associated with less "getting-into-trouble behavior" at school than the paradoxical communications employed by Andrea's father.

None of the members of the group perceived the school regulations as other than "unfair." All regarded it as completely unfair and as an insult to their perceptions of justice. They also perceived the smoking of the teachers, who, by example, were, as the children described it, "supposed to set the example of how to be", as setting the example of violating this rule. Four of the youngsters in the group had been given specific permission to smoke by their parents, albeit inconsistently in some cases. The child who had thus far got into trouble and been suspended fifteen times during her junior high school career for this behavior was told by her father repeatedly that the school "is stupid" for not letting children smoke in school. It is their unanimous perception that in violating this regulation, they are not guilty of any misdeed and that it is the regulation of the school that is "wrong" and not they.

All the youngsters in the group also perceived the school as absurdly ineffectual in meting out a punishment that has no effect on the continuation of the behavior. While the school perseveres in futile behavior, the children learn how to become more adept at committing the "offence" covertly.

We will look at the school and family influences on one further aspect of behavior for which the members of the group got into repeated trouble, and which constituted one of the prime reference points which the school authorities appeared to be pointing to when labelling a youngster a "disturbed", "deviant" "troublemaker."

## C H A P T E R    6

### THE IMPACT OF PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY INFLUENCES ON THE EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS AND/OR THOUGHTS TO AUTHORITY FIGURES

"When I grow up I'm going to be a teacher: to get  
back at the teachers."

--Charles

\* \* \* \* \*

Unlike "fighting" and "smoking", this behavior with its many variations is more difficult to give a name to. The children refer to one of its components as "telling the teacher how you feel about something," and to another as "cussing the teacher out when she makes you mad." Walking out of the classroom and slamming the door is another component of this set of punishable behaviors. The school defines such actions as "insubordination", "defiance", "sassing", "talking back", etc. Perhaps the most appropriate term for this spectrum of behaviors is "expressing feelings and/or thoughts, verbally, or nonverbally, to authority figures." Excerpts which clarify both the content of the components and the family and school influences on this syndrome were extracted from many contextual frameworks:

An incident had taken place in the school office, outside the office of one of the vice principals, in which the mother of a boy who had got into trouble with the school authorities had been called to be told of her son's behavior. Bernadette and Charles, along with Charles' father, who had also been called in, for the same reason, were in the office when the mother of the boy became very angry and verbally and physically aggressive to the vice principal. As Charles described the scene, his father "started cracking up with laughing when that lady told Mr. G off and started hitting him. She walked out and

just kept on truckin'." Charles' father's reaction was one which, if Charles were to follow his father's example, would have found Charles in still more trouble with the school authorities: he would have been punished for laughing at a scene which he observed from across the room. This was exactly what did happen to Bernadette in that situation.

Bernadette reported having witnessed the same incident (which was more personally meaningful for Bernadette than for Charles' father: the man who was being 'told off' and hit was the person who meted out almost all of the punishment that Bernadette and her friends had received during their years at Eldridge Junior High, much of which she had experienced as arbitrary and/or unfair.) Bernadette's reaction, like that of Charles' father, was to laugh. "I couldn't help it. I started cracking up. I laughed so hard. I couldn't help it, honest. It was just so funny to see her. . . Mr. G was so upset! I had to laugh. He gave me ten hours [detention] for laughing, but man, that was funny the way that lady did. Yeah, man, she just kept on truckin'. I cracked up."

Every child said in one version or another an echo of Dolores' words:

that

"you can't say anything to the teacher, but the teacher say things about anybody! Like today in the cafeteria this boy was walking out and Mr. G told him to get the bag off the table and he [the boy] said 'No. It's not mine', and the teacher said, 'OK, leave it there. And I'll have you kicked out.'"

Beth: "I got kicked out of both cafeterias for that and couldn't eat lunch in the cafeteria no more."

In another instance, a teacher had reportedly become angry and said to the class, as Charles described it:

"I'm sick of this damn bull' (slamming the door). 'Everybody is going to write 5000 words.' Then one boy said: 'I ain't gonna do it. I didn't do nothin'.' And the teacher said, 'Then you won't come back into my room!'"

Bernadette: "They give my little brother a hard time, just cuz he's my brother."

Charles: "A girl walked in the class late and the teacher

said, 'I'm sick of everybody getting away with these damn fake passes' and the girl said, 'Who are you talking to? Me?' and he said, 'Damn right I'm talking to you! And if you don't like it you can get out of my class.' So the girl said, 'Fuck you then.' and walked out. She got kicked out for two weeks for that. (This last sentence, as with so many other denouements spoken of throughout the sessions, was said with an air of passive resignation--an acceptance of the futility of imagining it might be otherwise someday, rather than with the hot-headed defiance universally attributed to the youngsters in the group.)

Bernadette: "They call you 'nigger.' Mr. G call me it. I told my father. My mother she don't believe in this stuff [talking back], but my father said, 'If someone calls you nigger you call him anything.'" [Here, as always, Bernadette expressed many more thoughts and feelings than it was possible for a listener to hear as audible or intelligible words].

Bernadette: "These girls were running in the halls and Mr. G said, 'Stop runnin', Nigger', and she said, 'I don't like people bein' talkin' to me like that,' and she got kicked out."

Bernadette: "The teachers cuss at you and that's OK."

Amy: "They say things about anybody."

"How many of you have had teachers curse at you?"

Amy: "I have."

Bernadette: "So many times it's pathetic, but if you cuss back you get suspended."

Dolores: "In this other school my friend goes to they will listen to your side and go back to the teacher and try to break down the teacher's story if you say you tellin' the truth and that's not how it happen. But here they just say 'You out'; 'the teacher's right,' even when the teacher's wrong. Wrong is right and right is wrong."

Charles: "One thing, a teacher can tell a lie on you and they pass that! Even my mother and father got more respect for me!"

Andrea: "They [the vice principals] gotta take somebody's side; believe me or believe the other person. So if I'm a trouble maker they're not gonna believe me if the other kid's good."

Sammy: "Yeah!"



Dolores: "I got kicked out for nothin'. I was mad! If I had that teacher right now this period, I wouldn't be able even to come here, that's how he is. They throw people out and bring them back in [i.e., permit them to return to school] and throw them right back out again! When I had to come in to see them because I had got kicked out [prior to being admitted back into classes], when I told him I was mad at being thrown out for something I didn't do, he said, 'If you're gonna be mad you will have to get out. Either cool down, or get out.' Just after he already told me I was kicked out for five days!"

Beth: "After Mr. G threw me out of class the week before, he asked me if I thought the class was dumb, and I did. So I told the truth; I said yes; so he threw me out of class. We were doin' our oral reports and nobody was getting a good mark. It's stupid. You know, you don't know what to say because everybody laughs. It's embarrassing!"

Amy: "Yeah. It's awful! It's so embarrassing. Everybody laughs at you, so it's stupid to do it."

Beth: "Everybody laughs so you get embarrassed so I said, 'This is stupid, because I was embarrassed and it was stupid to try to give an oral report when everybody just laughs at you and you don't know what to say because everybody laughs at you. The teacher said, 'Do you think it's crappy and dumb?' He asked me, so I had to admit it: I said, 'Well, yeah,' but not in a bad tone, and he said, 'Well, then get out!'"

Charles: [very upset]"When I grow up I'm going to be a teacher to get back at the teachers!"

Sammy: "Yeah."

Dolores: "Teacher said to this girl, 'Why don't you do your homework?' She said, 'I had to go somewhere.' [Mimicking a frighteningly vicious snarl], 'You didn't have to go nowhere!' She said, 'Yes, I did.' He said, 'Hush up.' She said, 'OK.' A little while later she was talking to another girl in class and he called her by a different name from hers and she said, 'That's not my name. My name is Lillian,' and he said, 'Get out of my class!'"

[to Dolores]: "What does your father say about your cursing out the teacher?" [Dolores has said that "cussing out the teacher" is one of her biggest trouble-causing behaviors].

Dolores: "He said 'Good!' He talks about when he was young and the teacher got him mad and gave him a hard time and how he talked back to them and one day he cussed the teacher out because she really got him mad. And that's when he started

swearing. He's glad I cuss the teachers out!"

Dolores: "My father not against me cussing the teacher. My mother she say, 'Hold your temper and just don't say nothin'.'"

Later, in a discussion about the school regulation that reportedly said, "Everytime you go to the bathroom you got to take that pass home to your parents that you went to the bathroom--how many times--and they gotta sign it," Dolores described her mother's unwillingness to go along with the school regulations this way:

"My mother don't like all that stuff the school say do. She think's it's crazy. She won't sign it."

Charles: "They out against you in this school!"

Sammy: "Yeah, that's for sure!"

Charles: "My mother say when the teacher talk bad to you ignore them but if they say they don't like you, you got a right to tell them that you don't like them neither! You should have a right to tell them how you feel about them and they should have the right to tell you how they feel about you."

Bernadette: "My mother says that too."

On another occasion, when Charles was saying that if there were no rules in the school everyone would be saying 'Fuck you' to the teacher, Beth responded angrily:

"So? What's wrong with that? People should be allowed to express what he feels."

and Sammy echoed her sentiment with "Yeah, they should!", chorused by the whole group hollering simultaneous agreements.

The children's parents insisted that the children had a right to respond to the teachers the way they did. When sent home to be punished

for 'cussing the teacher out', they were applauded, or at the very least, in some cases simply not reprimanded. Regarding acts seen as insubordination, etc. all the youngsters reported that this is a behavior for which they repeatedly get into trouble. All nine reported having been spoken to by teachers in a manner that I would define as hostile or angry; all nine reported experiencing teachers "cussing" at them in class, many times. All nine shared the perception that if they spoke to a teacher in precisely the same tone of voice or manner demonstrated by the teacher they would be suspended for "talking bad" to the teacher. All nine were of the opinion that it is considered acceptable behavior for the teacher to say unkind or derogatory remarks to a child and that it is unacceptable, punishable behavior for the child to respond any other way than submissively. All nine of them expressed the serious conviction that it is "wrong" to respond submissively; "wrong" to "let somebody talk to you that way and not say nothin' back."

All four who spoke of their parents commenting on this (the other five throughout the sessions made reference to the fact that "You can't talk to my parents; they won't listen", or, "They don't talk to me") were explicitly instructed not to respond submissively: all were instructed to continue demonstrating the assertive behavior, for which they would "get into trouble" and be punished. It was their shared belief that they would be punished by their parents if they responded submissively.

Eight of the nine youngsters indicated through their comments that their parents had implicitly demonstrated that pejorative, demeaning, derogating, hostile verbal aggression was the appropriate response to behaviors experienced as annoying, irritating or displeasing. For six of

the nine youngsters, this implicit communication was, by their description, demonstrated by extreme verbal aggression from parents to them personally and to two of the remaining three, by extreme verbal aggression from the parents to their opposite-sexed siblings. All except the one youngster who lived in a single-parent home reportedly heard this general manner of response from one or more of their parents, directed toward others and/or the "outside world."

Youngsters who "get into trouble for cussing the teacher out" seemed to perceive themselves in these situations as "damned if they do and damned if they don't." As with the other situations in which they find singular lack of success in coping with the standards for acceptable behavior during their junior high school years, they were experiencing great difficulty in assimilating the data of their experience.



## C H A P T E R 7

## OTHER PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

"You got a long way to go: we all got a long way to go."

--Charles, to Helen

\* \* \* \* \*

It is tempting to consider presenting detailed excerpts from the participant observation data which demonstrate dramatically the many other influences impinging upon the cognitions of these youngsters and which so richly describe the many other troubled parts of their lives. Such a presentation would be unwieldy. However, some of the more striking influences of environmental forces on the behavior of these children will be briefly touched upon.

The Impact of the Non-Abusive, or Less-Abusive, Parent

One of these revolved around the impact of the frequently mentioned experience of one of a pair of parents being significantly more abusive than the other. This experience appeared to contribute an additional perplexing and paradoxical element to children's perceptions of themselves and to their views of the parent who did not abuse them as much.

By "just standin' there and not doin' nothin' about it," as Sammy, for instance, spoke of his less abusive parent--his mother--she increased his difficulty at making sense of his experience.

Sammy; "I finally told my mother I hate him" [his stepfather, after another violent beating].

"What did your mother say when you told her that?"

Sammy: "She just says 'Why? What did he ever do to you? He don't do nothin' to you,' He does everything to me and she knows it: she stands there watchin'; she don't even say 'stop.' I don't know if my mother cares more about my step-father than she does for me but I think so, because she said, 'All you gotta do is like him and when you're 18 you can pack your bags and you can leave.'"

Andrea: "I've heard that lots of times."

Andrea's mother, unwilling to tolerate the father's extreme physical violence to the children, walked out and left the home, refusing to return unless he vowed to stop hitting them with a belt. She left the children, unprotected, with their father. "I don't know if she was sticking up for me or just--you know--leaving for herself," Andrea continues to experience great conflict over this doubt. She says she "wants to believe" her mother was "sticking up for her," but finds this improbable, under the circumstances. The child expected the non-abusive parent to react when he, the child, was being physically abused. He perceived these displays of physical abuse and aggression against him as decidedly unacceptable behaviors. If his parent cared for him, she would object to his being abused. Because he does not want to perceive his parent as not caring about him, nor of himself as a person not worthy of being cared about, there is no choice available to him for making sense of his experience. This dilemma can be seen operating, at slightly different levels, in the lives of those children to whom both parents were extremely abusive, those where one parent was significantly more abusive than the other, and those where the more abusive parent was a step-parent.

Sammy's overwhelming stress appeared to be closely related to the

fact that he perceived his stepfather, who visited extremely severe and wholly unacceptable physical abuse on him, as regarded as a more valued person by his mother than Sammy--despite the fact that Sammy's mother sees how "bad" his stepfather is. There would appear to be important paradoxical elements inherent in these environmental forces as they influence these youngsters which make it impossible for the child to assimilate the data of experience and increase the difficulty for the child in maintaining a sense of self-esteem.

Epstein (1973, 1976) posits the existence of a conceptual system developed by all humans, unwittingly, about the nature of the self, of the world, and their interaction, which Epstein calls the self-theory. The functions of this conceptualization are to optimize the pleasure/pain balance of the individual over the course of the foreseeable future, to facilitate the maintenance of self-esteem and to organize the data of experience in a manner that can be coped with effectively. These three concepts are seen as the major elements essential for a person to adapt effectively to life: a failure of the self-theory to carry out any of these functions finds the individual under stress. If the stress is great enough, disorganization of the self-concept occurs.

Many of the environmental influences, of the school and of the family, would appear to work against the three elements Epstein sees as crucial for effective human functioning in an individual's interactions with the world in which he lives.

### An Impact of Punishment

An essential variable for success in living in the youngsters' perceptions is not getting caught doing "bad things"--rather than refraining from doing "bad things." Both the school and the family can be thought of as exacerbating that view of reality for the child. Andrea's father, for example, authorizes her smoking in school, but punishes her severely each time she is caught smoking in school; the school punishes her, she believes, not for smoking in school, but for getting caught smoking in school. The fact that the school continues to employ the same punishment each time she is caught smoking, regardless of how many times this occurs, communicates to her that the school is aware that no connection exists between punishing a child for that behavior and the refraining from engaging in this behavior. The school is thus perceived, so it would appear, not as employing the punishment in order to stop the behavior but simply, as Charles defined it, because "they're out against you in this school!"

The one direct, isomorphic connection that does exist between the punishment and the behavior has to do with getting caught engaging in this behavior. Each incident of the punishment serves to increase the efforts to keep from getting caught. Andrea, as an example, has learned nothing about refraining from an unacceptable behavior from her repeated punishments by the school: she has learned a great deal about how to be more effective at not getting caught.

The youngsters appeared to measure their own worth in terms of how adept they are at not getting caught; Duke's proudest statement about



himself throughout the sessions was "I get away with everything: I never get caught." The school perceived Duke's behavior as less deviant, less "disturbed", than that of most of the others in the group. At home, too, Duke is a professed master at getting away with most of what he does that he knows are considered offenses by his mother: he convinces his mother that things he breaks, or makes off with, were done by his sister. His mother's punishment style is not the excessive physical abuse experienced by most of the others in the group: rather, his mother's punishment, when he is caught, is ambiguous.

Duke: I got caught that time [in some trouble in a railroad yard]. The cops took me home. My mother was feelin' sick. She said, 'I'm gonna get you when I get well.' Then when she got well she forgot about it. Then when I do somethin' wrong, she says, 'Yeah? I still haven't forgot about that railroad stuff you did!' I get away with everything! Nobody catches me!"

Another time, when the group was speaking about their parents' excessive punishment, Duke, laughing, said:

"My mother for punishment says 'Stay in the yard,' but I don't. I sneak off, but she knows."

Sammy and Amy were perceived as the experts at "talking their way out of it" when they were caught. (Interestingly, the group perceived their greater success at this envied ability as a function of Sammy and Amy's having the most "innocent" appearance--an attribute which Frank and I perceived these two as possessing.)

Sammy [about stealing]: I know how to get out of it. All you gotta do is start talking to them [the store personnel who catch him stealing]; say 'I ain't gonna do it again; I needed

the stuff; sorry, it won't happen again,' so they just call your parents; but I just give 'em the wrong phone number where no one's home; so they write your name and stuff on this paper and say, 'Well, if you get caught again, then you'll go to court.' It always works."

On another occasion, Sammy described how he would innocently say he had just realized he didn't have enough money for the item in his possession, and that he was on his way out to the parking lot to get more money from his mother to pay for it, and had just forgotten to set the item down before going outside. "Then, when I got outside, I'd run."

Andrea, who shoplifted extensively for seven years, stopped as a result of the trauma she experienced when caught. She shook visibly when relating the terror pervading this experience of two years ago, saying that it still "scares [her] to think of it," yet she expressed great regret that she can't overcome her dread of getting caught so that she might continue stealing. Amy, never caught, said "I think I know how she feels, but I'll never get caught." In Amy's perception, her conviction that she will never get caught makes the stealing in which she regularly engages reasonable behavior.

### On Compassion and Tenderness

Throughout the entirety of the group sessions, touching on every aspect of their lives, their feelings about themselves and others with whom they interacted, no child in the group reported, described nor alluded to ever having witnessed an expression of human tenderness, compassion nor gentleness of response between two human beings. Even in the role playing of an ideal hypothetical family scene, Beth, one of the

group members most easily able to acknowledge feelings, portrayed a neutral, non-punitive maternal attitude as representing the "most ideal response pattern a mother might demonstrate," and a non-sarcastic, apathetic, retort as the best she would imagine from a father. Having previously demonstrated a family scene as it had taken place in her home--where her parents' actual reactions included rejection, verbal abuse, profanity, threats of physical aggression, provocation of guilt, etc.--and where Beth was able to speak of her parents' response patterns contemptuously--Beth reversed roles and played the role of the mother, and then the father, demonstrating what she envisioned as the "best possible ways in which she could imagine parents responding to a child." Neither Beth, nor any of the other youngsters, appeared to have any concept of human concern, human tenderness, compassion nor empathy--in a situation where any of these might have been appropriate, or "ideally" wished for, by other youngsters--in their repertoires of human behavior.

This lack in their experience was demonstrated even more sharply in a poignant scene which followed a display of human compassion for one of the youngsters.. Andrea and Duke had been arguing and Andrea had suddenly choked up and left the room. We learned from Amy that a friend of Andrea's had died a few days earlier. When she returned, very uncertain and uneasy about having wept, I walked over and gave her a gentle hug and quietly told her of my empathy for her feelings. After a period of atypical silence, Frank asked the group what they were feeling. For a moment no one said a word and then Duke responded in a tone so remarkably different for this so-heavily defended young, tough, clowning youth--who described himself as so unmoved by emotions that he laughs at funerals--

saying;

"I thought, 'It's like a movie! You see people doing that in movies.' I didn't think I would ever be in a situation where somebody would go over and do that to somebody!"

Frank asked if he, and the others, thought people do that in 'real life.' Duke then became very moved, and very decidedly different than we had yet seen him. After many sessions, he was finally able, for the first time, to speak about his feelings. The wild, laughing, derisive, clowning tough guy--the "kingpin" of his peer cohort subculture said, almost in a whisper,

"I was trying to say I laugh at the wrong times and if I had known that happened [that Andrea's friend had died], I would never have said that [a clowning, defensive remark he had made earlier]. I didn't know or I wouldn't have said that. I didn't even know. When they criticize, that's when I get mixed up, you know?"

Perhaps even more significant, from the perspective of the impact of environmental influences on their behavior patterns, was that having been exposed to compassion and empathic modes of responding, and to positive rather than negative or neutral ways of responding to others, one of the group members was able to add this to his behavioral repertoire, which he demonstrated in a remarkably moving scene. After the session in which Helen had spoken at length of all her history of hard times, of having been "busted" for drugs, of having carried a knife, been in reform school, been charged with assault and battery, being raped, having an abortion, she became in some measure less accepted by the group. The group had learned that she had exaggerated the punishments she had re-



ported for some of these offenses and they were not easily forgiving of someone who was discovered to be untruthful. In a much later session, after Helen had been to court to face the most recent assault and battery charge, some of the comments of group members (e.g., that she "didn't have all her marbles") had at first been reacted to defensively. During the break, however, she began to weep uncontrollably and remained in the room while the others went out for a drink of water. Frank and I sat down on the floor next to where she lay in a distraught state. We both attempted to comfort her and respond to some of the fears she had expressed about "not knowing where to go or what to do," in the face of her traumatic family situation.

When the group returned to the room, I was concerned about what their reaction, previously so unsympathetic to what they had described as a bid for sympathy, would be when they discovered her lying on the floor crying. The group trooped in and sat in their chairs staring silently at the large-framed girl lying on the floor. Before the tension had an opportunity to rise, Charles walked over and sat down on the floor beside Helen and touched her arm in a very tender way. In a very gentle, very serious voice, he said "I know how you feel. Look at it this way: look how far you got, Helen. Just keep trying. You'll make it. Look how far you come from. You got a long way to go. We all got a long way to go. You'll make it." It was a profoundly moving experience for all of us in the room. This young black adolescent whose father "beats him with a belt," who only a few sessions earlier had held the group in the grip of tense anxiety while he taunted them by playing with a switchblade knife, who has to fight for even the smallest crumb of recognition as an

individual in his overcrowded home, was kneeling on the floor and patting the arm of the sexually-threatening, knife-wielding, violent-fighting, reform-school-tough white girl disliked even by her peers, and was saying infinitely gentle, compassionate, empathic words of comfort. These were youngsters described by school authorities as not caring about anything.

PART III

IMPACTS RECONSIDERED: RELEVANCE AND RESEARCH

## C H A P T E R 8

## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP AS INDIVIDUALS

"The teacher's right, even when the teacher's wrong;  
wrong is right and right is wrong."

--Dolores

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How, ask Trickett, Kelly and Todd (1972), are we to view the individual adolescent's behavior in terms of his responses to environmental influences and the socialization process? "Individual outcomes which have most concerned students of socialization include values, self-concept or identity, self-esteem, and at times the more diffuse criteria of mental health" (p. 368). If individual behavior is to be considered in relation to particular socialization environments, they suggest, relevance to interaction with such environments must be made quite explicit. They suggest that one possible way of organizing a view of the individual and making the interactive and relational features of his behavior especially explicit is to consider the relevance of various behaviors and attributes to his modes of coping with the environment.

It is important, according to the view presented by Trickett et al. (1972), from a mental health standpoint, for instance, if a set of conditions in the school is producing low self-esteem and reducing a student's chances of coping with school situations. On the individual's side we can assume, they assert, that the adolescent is likely to experience some degree of lowered self-esteem and conflict as a result of having fewer options to deal with a problem. Important in the long run, both for the individual and the organization, in the view of Trickett et al., is his



behavioral response to such a situation.

In this section my intent is to present a closer look at the members of the group as individuals to demonstrate some representative ways in which the impact of their interacting environments relates to their behavioral responses to situations.

Amy. Amy's parents communicate a repeated message to her: it is wrong, and "bad", for you to hit others when they make you angry. If you do get angry and hit others, you will be doing wrong and therefore I will get angry and hit--"kill"--you for having got angry and hit, in order to demonstrate to you that it is wrong to get angry and to hit. "Hitting," said Amy, "is the only thing I know." Amy's father exhibits perhaps the most violently explosive aggressive behaviors of all the parents of the group (although this is difficult to assess: the fathers of Helen, Sammy, Andrea, Dolores and Charles are all apparently extremely violent). He is extremely violent toward Amy, and her mother. He attacks the police when they come to subdue his violence. Amy lives in fear of her father's violence; and of her own. Her father, who sets the example for Amy, tells Amy that as the oldest child in the family, she must remember that she "sets the example" in the home for the younger children, and therefore, she should not use physical aggression: she will be doing wrong if she does.

The school's message to Amy is: if you get angry and hit here, we will send you home to your parents, to learn from them "how to behave." Paradoxically, Amy is under an injunction to perceive her parents and their physical aggressive behavior as right, when they engage in it, and to perceive them as right when they tell her that physical aggressive

behavior is wrong and bad. She is under still another paradoxical injunction when the school "teachers", who do not engage in physical violence, tell her that it is wrong to engage in physical violence, that she must learn not to engage in physical violence and that they will send her home, to learn that it is wrong to engage in physical violence, from the people who do engage in physical violence.

Amy, a child filled with rage--at her father's violence and at her inability to make any sense of her environment in its attempts to "socialize" her--sees only one option to deal with her rage. She exerts enormous amounts of energy in a constant struggle to keep it inside: to keep herself from doing wrong--from becoming angry and hitting, which Amy speaks of as "the only thing I know." Much of the time the controls work, and Amy appears as a "sweet young girl." But Amy has no control over those occasions on which, sometimes for totally inappropriate or insignificant reasons, her rigid controls slip and massive violent behavior erupts on to others. When this occurs, Amy becomes more terrified of her violence and tries harder to keep even more rigid controls on her aggression. Her parents' response to Amy's striking out is to "kill" her; the school's only response is to punish her--by sending her home to her parents.

With the exception of Duke, who lives with his mother and visits his father, but who was very guarded in his comments about their relationship to each other or his father's relationship to him, variations on this theme were found to run through the comments of all the other group members. The major variation is that for most of the youngsters there is an additional facet to the paradoxical communications: while Amy's father de-

mands that she ignore his behavioral example and obey the school's commands not to fight, their parents demand that the child disobey the school's commands not to fight. There appears to be a fine distinction here, but perhaps an important one. In the case of the children enjoined by their parents to obey their implicit and explication communications about aggression as a coping mechanism and to disobey the school's explicit communications, there is a choice open, albeit one for which they will be punished whichever course they choose. In Amy's case, she is enjoined to both obey and disobey her parents' communications: she is to obey their explicit message that fighting is not the appropriate response, and disobey their implicit communication that fighting is the only appropriate response. She, for whom this option is not open, is told that she must obey the school's injunction. She must not use aggression as a coping response. The other youngsters also explode into "violent aggression", but, by their reports, it does not bother them overmuch that they have "hot tempers." Amy, alone in the group, reports herself as terrified of her violent impulses.

\* \* \* \* \*

Andrea. Andrea's father tells her that she may smoke in school: he actively encourages this by buying her cigarettes for her. He also tells her that she may not get caught smoking in school. As experience has demonstrated countless times, it is not possible both to smoke in school and not to get caught smoking in school, even for one so adept at not getting caught as Andrea. She has been caught fifteen times smoking in school and, on each occasion, the school has given her the same message: if you disobey the school regulation against smoking, we will send you

to your parents, to learn from them "how to behave," Paradoxically, Andrea is under an injunction to perceive her parents and their attitudes and abilities to teach her how to behave as right: the school communicates this and her parents communicate this. But she is also under an injunction from the school to perceive what her parents teach her about how to behave as wrong. If she perceives her parents as right, the school will then perceive her as wrong, and she will be punished by the school and sent home. When she is sent home from school, she is now guilty of disobeying her father, who has given her a strict injunction not to be perceived by the school as wrong and sent home as punishment--for doing that which he told her was right to do. Thus she not only gets into trouble with the school for doing what her father says is right, but she also, repeatedly, gets in trouble with her father, and severely punished, for doing what her father says is right. Andrea is very frightened of the violent punishment by her father. In her perception, the only means of coping with this dilemma is to increase her efforts at not getting caught, which repeatedly fail.

What is remarkable is that Andrea's perception in this regard has become so confused as a result of the paradoxical communications that she believes that the offense for which she can be punished by the school is being caught smoking. (Amy is far more realistic in this regard. Her father forbids her to smoke, rather than telling her she can smoke and then punishing her for getting caught smoking. She shows her understanding that the regulation forbids smoking: "If they can smell it, forget it!" To which Andrea adamantly replies, "No! The only way is if they see you with a cigarette in your hand!")



When Andrea has employed this defiant stand as a coping mechanism, she has been suspended for the smoking and the defiance. She speaks with hostility against the school for unjustly punishing her in this situation. She honestly believes that she should not be punished for having committed the violation, but only for having been caught in the violation. This is not to be confused with the perhaps common stand of trying to bluff, or "con", authority figures out of thinking one is guilty in the hope of avoiding punishment while aware that one is guilty of the offense. Andrea sincerely believes that she is only guilty of an offense if she has been "caught red-handed" in the act of violating it. Unless she is caught directly in the act, Andrea--even when she drops the cigarette on the floor--believes that she has not violated the school's regulation.

Andrea does not have a coping response adequate to cope with this smoking-in-school situation. The school's coping response to Andrea's repeated violations of this regulation is to punish her by suspending her from school, month after month, year after year--for four years--comfortable with the myth that the appropriate response to a child's smoking is to suspend the child from school, secure in the belief that this response will eventually produce a change in the deviant behavior--regardless of the blatant evidence to the contrary. The school has a low opinion of Andrea for not learning from these suspensions to change her behavior. The school's myth prevents the school for considering the possibility that the same thing might also be said for the school,

\* \* \* \* \*

Bernadette. Bernadette's father communicates a repeated message to her: it is wrong to run from a fight or an argument of any kind. If she

does she will be punished severely by her father. The school tells Bernadette that if she fights when provoked she will be in trouble and suspended. Her father tells her that if she does not fight she will be in trouble and punished by him. Her father tells her that this applies to teacher and school authorities as well as to children.

The school tells Bernadette that it is wrong to call a person names, or to speak pejoratively (i.e., to a teacher or school official). In school, Bernadette hears the teachers call children names and speak to them pejoratively. She knows that this is wrong and bad and she is much confused by the fact that some teachers, who punish her for wrong and bad behavior in general, and for this wrong and bad behavior in particular, themselves engage in this behavior.

Each time that she is confronted by an instance of this behavior--when a teacher speaks to her in this way--she "cusses out" the teacher, as her father has told her is the right thing to do. The teacher, who has demonstrated this behavior, sends her to the office for behaving offensively and she is punished. When she reports this to her father, he tells her that her behavior was right. As one example, Bernadette's father tells her that if anybody calls her "nigger" she can call him anything she wants. Her father is telling her that being called "nigger" by an authority figure is wrong, that it is a despicable thing--a thing that must not be tolerated under any conditions. He tells her that it is so bad that it warrants even extreme behavior (extreme from the standpoint of the school, i.e., behavior for which a child will be suspended). He demands that she take specific prescribed by him action in retaliation to this behavior, action for which she will then be considered (at least

equally) in the wrong.

He is also telling her that he is unwilling, or unable, to take the alternative action which he, as an adult, is in a safer position to take: to report this teacher to the principal. The message he gives her is: in a situation with two alternative coping responses, one guaranteed to get her in trouble and the other a viable alternative which will be guaranteed to not get her in trouble, choose the course destined to get her in trouble--and the course guaranteed to have no effect in altering the behavior of the other.

In all of these situations, in order to obey her father and keep from getting punished at home, Bernadette must disobey the school; in order to keep from getting into trouble, and getting punished, at school, she must disobey her father. This is a non-resolvable problem for Bernadette in response to her environment.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dolores. Dolores has a reputation with the school authorities as an extremely "militant" troublemaker. Her father is perhaps even more militant than those of other members of the group in demanding that she respond to the school (when, as he puts it, "they do things that make you mad"), in a militant manner. As a function of the school's viewing Dolores as a militant troublemaker, the school authorities react differentially to her. Representative is an instance in which Dolores was suspended from school for skipping gym class on a day when she had attended the gym class, as attested to by others in the group who saw her in class that day.

She had no way to prove that she was there (the word of other "trou-

blemakers" is not considered proof). The school had no way to prove that she was not there. Nevertheless, Dolores was counted as absent and was told that she was being suspended for not having attended this class. She hated the gym class and would have preferred not to attend it, but did so to keep out of trouble. She experienced great anger at finding that she was being suspended, for not having attended that class. When she expressed her anger over this injustice, she was told, after it had been made clear that she was being suspended because the school did not believe her, that she "had better get rid of that attitude" during the five days she was, as punishment, not permitted to attend school.

At home, her father told her that she was right to be angry and right to "swear" at the teachers for "making her mad." When she returned at the end of the five days, she was called in to the office and asked if she had got rid of her angry attitude, Dolores responded to this by telling them pointedly that she had every reason to be justifiably angry at the school for "doing that" to her. Confronted once again with still "another example of Dolores' militant defiance," the vice principal told Dolores "if you're going to be mad, you will have to get out!" This served to make Dolores even angrier, which in turn caused the school's perception of Dolores as an "angry person" to go up still another notch.

Dolores has no available coping response adequate to this situation. Perceiving the school as having done something that should cause her to get angry, she responds to this according to the injunction of her father's communication of the right way to respond to such a situation, which the school perceives as responding in "the wrong way." As a result of the school's perceiving her as responding in the "wrong" way, she is



either threatened with punishment or punished, which once again Dolores perceives as something for which she should get angry. In obeying her father's injunction she disobeys the school's injunction against expressing anger to a school authority. Dolores, her father and the school are caught in an endless feedback loop system: it is apparent that each person is situation for the other.

### Interaction

Analysis of the verbatim log revealed countless other examples of the individuals in the group relating to their interacting environments in which the troubled adolescent experienced lowered self-esteem and conflict as a result of having few or no options to deal effectively with a problem. The remarkable repetitiveness and redundancy apparent in the examples presented here is representative of the consistency of the pattern threading through each of the difficulties for which these youngsters are labelled troublemakers, deviant and disturbed.

The evidence would seem to support Murray's (1951) assertion: an interpersonal proceeding is the psychologist's most significant type of real entity; the unit is not the subject's behavior, but the subject-object interaction. Although Murray, and many others writing later, saw the "established disposition as residing in the brain," behaviors cannot, he wrote, be described or explained without reference to the object and situations which evoke them. It is necessary, Murray suggests, to give subject and object equal status and to include them both in every real entity or unit of interaction. No one proceeding, Murray posited along

with many other more recent writers, can be understood without reference to those proceedings which have led up to it and without reference to the actor's aim and expectations. As he saw it, the relevant data would consist of subject facts reported by the individual and of objective facts observed by the psychologist or by others, with a sufficient supply of the two kinds of data.

Any beginning point in a vicious cycle proceeding must be an arbitrary one. Assume the school authority has made some statement which the child perceived as distressing. The child then makes what he believes is a reasonable and justifiable response to what he perceives as a stimulus demanding such a response. The relevant authority person, whether it be parent, teacher or vice principal, then responds to the child's response. Experiencing the child as a child hitting, hurling epithets and insults, "cussing them out", knocking over desks, slamming the door, storming out of the room--the authority person views himself as perfectly justified in punishing the youngster for these maladjusted behaviors and as having been confirmed in his perception of the child as a maladjusted youngster.

In the child's mind, the behaviors are not perceived as maladjusted, but as adjusted--adjusted to the stimulus factors as the child perceives them. Thus, when punished for employing what seems to them the only imaginable response--and the response that the stimulus demands--he feels still more unfairly, unjustly treated.

The punishment is perceived as still another stimulus factor to be responded to. Again the child responds in the only ways available to him, from the repertoire of response categories that have been transmitted to him. The interaction sequence is now a vicious cycle from which

it becomes impossible for either the child, his parents or the school authority figure to emerge.

Perceived as a child who causes trouble, who misbehaves, who flaunts authority; who responds with violence and profanity and defiance, the child becomes characterized as a child who will react in these ways, and as such, represents a threat to the authority and self-confidence of the teachers and authority figures. These adults now are primed to react to the now-predictable hostile behavior. Bristling, they respond defensively to the child, and the child, primed to react to the now-predictable responses he finds himself evoking in the authority persons, reacts defensively to the adult.

The more the authority person--whether parent or teacher or vice principal--responds to the child as a stimulus factor for trouble making, the more the child responds to the authority person's responding to him in this light. Each is now geared to react to the other in this vein: the child perceives the authority person as "out to get you", to punish you; the authority person perceives the child as always a trouble maker, and expects the child to get in trouble and to require punishment.

Since the parents and teachers and vice principals all have "right" on their side, they all collude, however inconsistently and paradoxically, in telling the child he is in the wrong and they are in the right--even when the parents' view of what is right is the school's view of what is wrong. Dolores made a remark in one of the sessions in which she said "Right is wrong and wrong is right." At the time I did not realize the far-reaching ramifications of that perception.

However confusing this is perceived by the child--who has extreme

difficulty in understanding how it is that he is the one who is in the wrong, since in his perception he is only responding to the behavior of the adults, and is responding in accord with a perceived injunction--he nevertheless becomes convinced that somehow, somewhere, he is bad and a trouble maker. If only one adult in his world characterized him as bad and as a trouble maker, it would be possible for him to perhaps disown it or impute it to the other. But for these youngsters their parents, their teachers, the vice principal, the guidance counselor and the principal jointly, consistently, assure him on all sides that he is indeed a trouble maker and bad. Through the process of validation across persons and over time, he comes to incorporate this label into his self-image.

Our experience with the eleven youngsters in our group bore this out: although it distressed them greatly to be thought of and treated as trouble makers, each referred to himself, sadly, as "a troublemaker." Our experience with them over many months also demonstrated that they felt powerless to exert any influence over the forces which so characterize them and so respond to them. With the exception of Duke, who believed he could figure out ways to circumvent some parts of getting into trouble, they felt powerless to be one of the youngsters who somehow managed to get through the hectic years at Eldridge Junior High School without always getting into trouble.

At the time--that is, during the sessions--whenever a remark was made which seemed to carry this connotation, it sounded like a self-pitying remark, the kind of remark that a petulant child might make. The implication was that somehow becoming a person at Eldridge Junior High who was not in trouble all the time was an option not open to these



youngster, in some abstruse way that they did not understand. It was not until after many trips through the data, when the pattern underlying the countless frenetic, bedlam-like discussions became clear, that I realized that their perception was right.

## C H A P T E R 9

## SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT RESEARCH WITH ADOLESCENTS

As Raush (1976) and Cronbach (1975) remark, it has become more and more apparent from research that we cannot generalize about persons without implicit or explicit reference to the situations for which the generalizations are presumably valid, and we cannot generalize about situations without implicit or explicit reference to the persons for whom the generalizations are presumably valid.

In 1951 Murray, defining himself as writing from an "eccentric and unfashionable viewpoint", said that the significant unit for psychological research is the interpersonal proceeding and that the environment is included in every adequate conceptualization of a personality. Sullivan (1953) posited that the unit of study is the interpersonal situation and not the person. In his view, "each person in any two-person relationship is involved as a portion of an interpersonal field, rather than as a separate entity, in processes which affect and are affected by the field" (p. xii). There is a growing literature from those who view the interpersonal, the interactive, the interdependent as the defining hallmarks of critical psychological study (Raush, 1965, 1969, 1974, 1976; Raush et al., 1959, 1960, 1974; Watzlawick et al., 1967; Barker, 1960, 1963, 1964, 1969; Cronbach, 1975; McKeachie, 1974; Bronfenbrenner, 1972, 1970; Kelly, 1968, 1969; Trickett et al., 1972; Trickett & Todd, 1972; Todd, 1974, in press; Gump, 1969 and others).

Averill (1973), investigating personal control of aversive stimuli, concluded that no simple relationship exists between personal control and

stress: "The stress-inducing or stress-reducing properties of personal control depend upon the meaning of the control response for the individual; and what lends a response meaning is largely the context in which it is embedded" (p. 300).

The context in which the responses of these youngsters is embedded is that of a complex interdependent system of several subsystems. As Todd (1974) wrote, "Psychology has not sufficiently acknowledged the mutual interdependence of persons and social (and physical) environments--that persons are embedded in a social matrix, and that social systems, in turn, are embedded in the bio-psychological systems of the individuals who participate in them" (p. 3).

Replying to the question, "How are we to view the individual adolescent's behavior in terms of his response to environmental conditions and the socialization process?" Trickett, Kelly and Todd (1972) wrote, "If individual behavior is to be considered in relation to particular socialization environments, its relevance to interaction with such environments must be made explicit" (p. 368). They pointed to the urgency for research involving links between these areas of knowledge about the high school environment and its impact on the adolescent, and pointed additionally to the remarkable lack of detailed, systematic reports based upon extended observations of life in high schools. One of the primary research needs which they suggested might best be met through systematic naturalistic observation in high schools was an attempt to gain information on the opportunities and dangers for adolescent socialization in the school experience. One thing I think I have learned through working with a group of adolescents for whom the socialization process in the school

has thus far been an entirely negative experience is that a purely naturalistic observation form of investigation is perhaps not the optimal research method in this regard.

The dangers potential in the high school socialization process would appear, from this study, to lie in the interpersonal interactions occurring between the youngster and the teacher, and between the youngster and the school authorities. Given the nature of the many specific interactions which appear to have the most negative impact on the socialization of the troubled adolescent, the results of the investigation would make it appear highly unlikely that an outside observer could fail to serve as an inhibiting force on the relevant response patterns of the adult authority figures.

Additionally, I learned that the impact of the socialization process, at least for those youngsters who repeatedly fail in their attempts to achieve any degree of effectiveness in school, is intimately tied to the concurrent (and historical) socialization processes arising out of the family environment. This is quite different from the traditional view--that a child is the product of his family background and thus will be either more or less culturally advantaged or deprived upon entering school--and that if all goes well the early cultural deprivation or disadvantage of the child can be "made up for" by a variety of enrichment techniques. Or that lower SES parents produce "kids who don't care,"

What I learned is that there are countless, ongoing, current interactions between the child and his home that directly affect--and are affected by--his everyday interactions in the school. It would appear from this study that it is the enmeshment of these two subsystems and the



child's simultaneous (or rather, sequential) interactions with both that result in the specific impact of the school socialization process on a given child.

### Implications of Survey Questionnaire Studies with Adolescents

The study suggests that a fruitful research method for gaining information about opportunities and dangers for adolescent socialization in the school experience at this age level is extended interaction with a group of adolescents. From what I have learned about the covert and subtle processes influencing the large event manifold, I do not believe one could become aware of much that is important through naturalistic observation in the classrooms, without employing other methods as well.

Wanting to employ multiple methods to attempt to understand these youngsters, I decided to use a detailed questionnaire along with the extended period of participant observation. I had a decided advantage, perhaps, over most investigators concerned with the socialization processes of adolescents in schools, where questionnaires were concerned: I had had time and opportunity to establish a warm rapport and a sense of trust. When I asked them, at the end of the sessions--prior to the all-day picnic outing we went on with the youngsters at the end of their school term--to fill out a questionnaire, I told them that I was interested in this questionnaire for the purpose of achieving a survey of "kids' attitudes about the things that concern them." I shared with them the thought that their assistance in responding to the questionnaire could help add to the storehouse of knowledge about youngsters' attitudes about

important-to-them concerns. By presenting them with an understanding that their replies would serve a meaningful purpose, their motivation was increased--motivation which was already high by virtue of their sense of mutual rapport. I would guess that they were somewhat more highly motivated to reply to the best of their ability than subjects given a questionnaire in the classroom by a teacher, for instance. They were also instructed to not sign their names, so that the information would be totally confidential. Because some researchers suggest persons might prefer not to be anonymous, they had the option of handing the questionnaire to me personally.

If I had not studied these youngsters so intensively over an extended period of time I would not have known how invalid the results of that questionnaire were. Because I knew them so well, I was able to realize, in analyzing the results of the questionnaire, that the questionnaire had been a useless waste of time. A large percentage of the questions were directly related to issues the group had dealt with intensively. Supported by the self-disclosures of other group members, the perceived non-judgmental acceptance of "bad" feelings and behaviors, and emotionally carried away in responding to a highly charged reference of the experience or feeling or attitude of another, they were able to speak to these issues at a remarkable level of honesty. Writing their true views and/or experiences on paper was apparently something entirely different. At least half of the responses were simply "socially" or "personally desirable" responses: idealized responses about the way they wished things were. In addition, the paucity of responses was striking in contrast to the richness of their detailed verbal accounts: for these youngsters,

writing was a very difficult chore. They worked hard on the questionnaires and in the end it was readily apparent that in comparison with the depth, breadth and "truthfulness" of what it had been possible to achieve through sustained participant observation, the questionnaire method was impressively shallow: the results were too meaningless and too incomplete (and often illegible) to include in the study.

This realization made me wonder, also, if even intensive, one-person interviews with troubled adolescents could succeed in unearthing the wealth of information one becomes privy to in an interacting group situation. When it became apparent that the one behavior they would not tolerate from each other in the group was any kind of exaggeration or sidestepping the truth, I realized this was yet another advantage of group research with adolescents: once they felt "at home", they served as powerful controls for the validity of the data.

### The Group Counselling Model: How It Worked

The model we employed in our group sessions was based on that described by Winder and Savenko (1970) in their work with neighborhood youth programs, where they were working with urban youth who were ghetto dwellers and school dropouts, trying to help them break the cycle of failure, poverty and alienation. Its aims and methods seemed to us more appropriate than the many group therapy models of other authors. A major effort on our part was to offer support to the group as they anxiously revealed highly personal feelings or experiences.

This support, which sustained the youngsters during the sessions,

also served as a model for the later support that the group members were able to give to each other. We acted to acknowledge the youngsters' feelings and to control them with the nature of reality.

Winder and Savenko described their objective from a research standpoint as one where "the objective was to search for a methodology of working with unmotivated youth which would, in fact, open communication channels and allow for a striking discourse of issues significant within the youths' own framework, rather than of those which a priori had been designated as significant by the staff" (p. 564).

It was our experience that participant observation in an extended group situation did indeed open communication channels and allow for such a striking discourse. Bronfenbrenner (1975) posited the conviction that "research on children will not begin paying off until psychologists reckon with the actual conditions in which children live and develop" (p. 12).

It is my contention that first-hand observation of the "actual conditions in which children live and develop" is not as critical for an understanding of the distressed adolescent as is the youngsters' subjective reality. As Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) have extensively demonstrated, "in all probability, reality is what we make it" (p. 95); it seems to make the most sense to consider their perceptions--the youngsters' interpretations--of the "actual conditions" influencing their lives throughout the socialization processes. As Brim (1975) reported to the American Orthopsychiatric Association in his Presidential Address, "It is time to let American children speak for themselves in order to find out what they are thinking." Participant observation in a group experience with adolescents proved to be an exceptional framework through which to



accomplish this goal.

A further significant element inherent in this model turned out to be the perhaps unique opportunity it provided to observe the youngsters' coping mechanisms and response tendencies as they dealt with other persons and events within the group sessions. That is to say, this model served to provide an opportunity for the youngsters to elaborate upon the significant influences in their lives and to demonstrate samples of the impact these influences have had in socializing them.

#### Participant Observation and the Clinical Approach

One difficulty one might posit, however, for basing research findings of the self-reports of adolescents would be the presumed inability on the part of the investigator to control for self-conscious socially-desirable responses, as well as the possible deliberate misrepresentations of situational factors which some might predict might be forthcoming from adolescents accustomed to "conning" adults. It was interesting, therefore, to learn that in this particular group constellation, a large percentage of the situational factors reported--both at home and at school--had been observed first hand by others in the group.

Thus, in this group setting of peers, conscious misrepresentation was controlled for by the presence of others who had observed the interactions first hand. Additionally, the youngsters served as one another's controls in another important way: in a situation where, for instance, another was not present during a significant interaction between one of the youngsters and a parent, or one of the youngsters and an authority

figure in the school, consistently one or more other group members had participated in an almost identical interaction which supported the believability of the data.

We were able to use ourselves as tools or instruments in a further valuable way: through experiencing their observable interactions with each other and with us, along with those they reported and had confirmed by others, we were able to experience in ourselves the kinds of stimuli these children generated that adult authority figures might respond to. As Gump (1969) pointed out, while a record of behavior can be studied for the information it gives about the behavior, it also may be used to create a picture of the environmental contexts with which the behavior is directly involved.

The socialization process as it affects youngsters in a secondary school represents the interactions of many subsystems. It is the constellation of all the teachers, and the teacher-monitors,<sup>11</sup> and the principal, and the vice principals, and the guidance counselor, and the school bus driver, as they interact with each other and with the child's parents and with the child--along with the interactions between the child and his parents and the parents with each other--that defines the major areas of direct activity influencing each youngster's perceptions. (The findings did not support the widely held view that peer influences at this age have a more heavily weighted impact than those of significant adults.)

There is no way to directly observe this large event manifold. What I learned is that one can directly observe the impact this constellation has on each student, and on a group of students, by studying their individual and group reports of their perceptions of these interpersonal, in-

teracting, interdependent influences. In the final analysis the data would seem to support the view that it is their perceptions--the sense they make of their experiences--which produce the impact on them.

One of the most essential things we needed to know was: what are the collection of stimuli and responses that characterize these youngsters' lives. Only with these in hand could one attempt to detect patterns that might help to gain some understanding of what their 'atypical' responses are about. We did not define conflict situations for them but only the broad questions: what are the conflict situations for these children; how do they respond to them; how do others respond to their responses; and what do the youngsters make of all this? Thus both the range of conflict situations and the responses were, of necessity, allowed to range free.

As Guttman (1969) points out, our usual definitions of standardization are based on superficial and external criteria: for example, the notion that if we keep our instruments, our questions, our gestures and our inflections constant from subject to subject, we somehow establish equivalence across situations. If our behavior remains the same, we assume, writes Guttman, that we somehow magically maintain the surrounding universe constant. The standardization we chose, suggested by Guttman, was in our condition of rapport.

We freed communication by suggesting through all the experiences that we provided that the sharing of socially tabooed material would not have the usual, feared and expected consequences--a process which Guttman employed with success in cross-cultural studies (perhaps, a viable analogy to studies with troubled adolescents). We created a milieu whose

norms sponsored the expression of emotions and attitudes important to the youngsters. We demonstrated our regard for them as unique persons: by taking their accounts very seriously, we tried to convey our interest in those aspects of each subject's life that are unique to him. Somehow, we did manage to meet the preconditions for significant communication with a "delinquent subculture" and the youngsters actively chose to "open up."

The group was a place where they could let off steam without fear of retaliation, a factor missing from their lives. It was also a place where they were able to learn that they could still be respected as worthwhile persons despite revealing their "badness." Perhaps one of the elements which should weigh most heavily in favor of the use of the participant observation research model through group sessions over time, for research with adolescents, is that it can, we learned, provide an opportunity to add positive influences into the lives of youngsters desperately in need of such influences, while at the same time adding to the storehouse of research knowledge essential for determining the ultimately optimal levels of intervention into a distressed system.



## CHAPTER 10

## INTERACTIONAL IMPACT AND INTERVENTION IMPLICATIONS

Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) point to a lack in the existing research where the pragmatics of interactional phenomena are concerned: while Raush had demonstrated, in 1965, the phenomenon they reported, most of the existing studies up until the time of their writing appeared to limit themselves mainly to the effects of person A on person B, without taking equally into account that whatever B does influences A's next move, and that they are both largely influenced by, and in turn influence, the context in which their interaction takes place.

It became clear that the described behaviors of the youngsters, their parents and the school authorities contained varying degrees of repetitiveness--of redundancy--from which tentative conclusions can be drawn demonstrating the effects of the pragmatic (the behavioral) effects of their conjoint interactional phenomena. The data indicate that the "problem behavior" of these youngsters is a direct function of these conjoint interactional phenomena. Few, if any, detailed, systematic reports based upon extended observations in high schools exist (Trickett, Kelly & Todd, 1972). One reason they suggest for this vacuum is "the limited development of conceptions of social environments which are complex and authentic enough to provide a point of view as well as integrate hypotheses about life in a social setting" (p. 372). These authors urge the development of such a conceptual framework, of crucial importance to extending our understanding of adolescent socialization in the school setting. They assert that "the mounting social and mental health problems far sur-

pass our manpower available" (p. 401), and that new conceptualizations, and research supporting them, are critical to a truly preventive approach to intervention, in the area of disordered adolescent behavior, in the high schools.

Much of our current knowledge for planning preventive services and for intervening in the case of "problem adolescents" is incomplete, in that it derives primarily from the study of selected individuals rather than from analyses of larger social units, with the implication such analyses hold for conjoint-interactional phenomena. As did Kelly (1968), we attempted to modify this custom by focussing on a group of students labelled as deviant within the secondary school in conjunction with an analysis of the influences of the school. Further, in an effort to clarify the complex relationship between the child and the secondary school system, a third interactive dimension was added: an analysis of the parallel influence of the family.

The data demonstrated that persons create, to some degree, the contexts in which they behave and that there is a circularity between the person and his environmental context, as Gump points out (1969). To begin with, the school environment contains an ongoing, established pattern of behaviors toward students determined by situations more than by specific individuals. For example, there is a pattern of behaving toward students caught smoking that is spelled out in advance. And there is a carefully spelled out set of demands and expectations defining the acceptable pattern of behaviors for students. Deviancy is defined, in this setting, by the extent to which an individual stays within the established patterns for student behavior. Such deviancy is underscored by a pre-

established patterning of punishments meted out for each instance of deviancy from the behaving patterns. To demonstrate the extent of these pre-existing patterns dictating student behaviors, and to give a clearer picture of some of the defining parameters of deviancy, I have compiled a list of the explicit behavioral expectations for the seventh, eighth and ninth grade youngsters at Eldridge Junior High. Many of these were extracted from a mimeographed sheaf, entitled, "Some things you should know about junior high school", distributed to entering seventh graders as they arrived on their first day of secondary school socialization. Others were demonstrated as demands and expectations through the group experience by the youngsters' running afoul of these demands and being suspended from school or given detention in connection with them.

#### Students at Eldridge Junior High School:

- may not fight;
- may not leave the building at any time during the day except for emergency reasons, specified in writing by a parent;
- may not go to the bathroom without a written permission slip;
- must take all bathroom passes home to be signed by a parent;
- may not talk except at specifically brief designated periods of the day. At those times the quality of tone of voice will be subject to monitoring and regulation by school authorities;
- may not speak in class without permission;
- may not voice an opinion about the teaching, or the discipline;
- may not display anger;
- may not talk back to a teacher, a principal, a vice principal or a guidance counselor;
- may not refrain from organized physical exercise simply on the ground of not wishing to engage in physical exercise on a given day;
- may not arrive before 8:05 a.m.;
- may not arrive after 8:20 a.m.
- may not make a telephone call without written permission;
- may not smoke;
- may not applaud programs in the auditorium except in moderation;
- may go to the nurse if sick only with written permission;
- may not walk in the school corridors except during intervals



between classes without written permission;  
must be worthy citizens at all times;  
must be loyal to the school;  
must choose friends wisely;  
will be judged and disciplined, and if necessary, punished by  
suspension from school, according to their abilities to  
adhere to these rules;  
will respond to all commands from any and all adults in the  
building.

The behaviors designated as ones which will "get them into trouble", then, are made clear: they are made explicit by the school authorities. The youngsters knew exactly what the things are for which they would be punished. So too the behaviors for which they would be punished at home are made specific to them. They know they will get in trouble at home for hitting their younger siblings: this has been made explicit by their having been punished, many times, for it. They know they will get in trouble at school for fighting: this has been made explicit by their having been punished, many times, for it. They know they will get in trouble at home for getting suspended from school. Indeed their fear of this punishment is so great that many of them were afraid to go home when the school "sent them home" suspended. They know they will get in trouble for smoking. They know they will get in trouble for "cussing out a teacher." With full knowledge of the behaviors for which they will get into trouble, they nevertheless continued, repeatedly and consistently, to do so. Yet they were clear about the strength of their desire not to get into trouble, at home or at school. The most oft-repeated message running explicitly and implicitly throughout the group session was their wish that they could somehow "not get into trouble all the time." Andrea's opening statement on the first day of the group sessions stands as



a bellwether for what the data would come to reveal:

"...If I could have one wish to change something about my life I'd wish I could stop being in trouble all the time, I've been in trouble so much so long that I wouldn't know what it was like not to be in trouble. I can't remember a time when I wasn't always in trouble. That's what I'd wish for to have changed about my life, to be someone who wasn't in trouble all the time."

Contrary to the opinion seemingly held about them by the authority figures in their lives, the youngsters whom we studied did care about the fact that they are always in trouble; they expressed the wish, urgently, that this was not the case for them. They desired, actively, not to get into the trouble they repeatedly found themselves in.

They know what it is that will get them into trouble. They want not to get in trouble. Yet they continue, relentlessly, to be always in trouble. Does the root of the problem, then, lie in the individual child? Are these just youngsters who, as the school authorities sometimes imply by their use of the term, are "born troublemakers"? The complex interaction patterning weaving itself throughout the warp and woof of the tapestry of their lives seems to belie that as a likely possibility.

The evidence suggests that what operates to keep these youngsters locked into this self-defeating pattern is a complex system of paradoxical interactional communications phenomena. The significant patterning disclosed by the data was one of consistent inconsistencies, paradoxes and contradictions, both between and among the home and school authority figures.

Among the many inconsistencies are the youngster's perceptions as-

sociated with some of the regulations of the school, e.g., they perceive as inconsistent, and therefore unfair and unjust, the regulation against smoking (said to be for all persons), which they are punished for violating, while teachers are permitted to violate this regulation as a matter of course. "Cussing the teacher out" is viewed by the school as a very serious offense yet, in the youngsters' perception "cussing children out", on the part of the teachers, is accepted behavior: As Bernadette sadly remarked, it occurs "so many times it's pathetic."

The school demands that the child not fight in the school and on the school property. The children perceived this as a demand rife with inconsistency: they found the school environment one in which it was difficult to avoid potential fight situations. The school provided no information regarding viable alternative coping mechanisms to employ in these situations. In the absence of viable alternative responses, the code among those who employ physical aggression in the school had it that those who made no response to potential fight provocation would become the most aggressed-against targets for physical aggression. The youngsters perceived the school as punishing them indiscriminately, whether their physical aggression occurred in an effort to "protect themselves" against the deliberate aggression forced upon them by another or whether it was engaged in as a malicious, purposeful aggression against another.

A difficult, but perhaps not yet impossible, bind would appear to exist for the child as far as his perception of the school's influence on this particular behavior was concerned. When seen as interacting with the contradictory injunctions, which are embedded in still another set

of internal inconsistencies, imposed by parents, the difficult evolved into the impossible. The communication from the school was perceived as "you must not fight: if you do you will be severely punished." The message from parents was "you must fight, in any and every altercation with other youngsters when provoked. If you do not, you will be severely punished." These youngsters cannot assimilate the inconsistencies between these elements, which might be seen as external examples of conflict, i.e., emanating from two distinct authority sources in their lives.

For some children other, internal, inconsistencies were part of the pattern. In many instances one parent was perceived as instructing the child (for example) to keep out of fights at school--although, as with the school authorities, no alternative coping information was provided--while the other parent demanded that the child not keep out of fights. Furthermore, most children were constantly exposed to physical aggression and/or physical violence as the coping mechanism employed by parents.

Not only, then, were they provided with no messages pertaining to or demonstrating alternative mechanisms with which to resolve conflict or with which to react to stress: it was powerfully demonstrated to them that in actual practice their parents view physical aggression--often extremely violent--along with verbal aggression, as the cogent coping mechanisms. Still another paradoxical communication manifested itself in the responses of many of the parents to the youngsters' use of physical aggression with regard to their siblings. These youngsters, whose parents universally employed physical aggression, and who instruct-

ed the child that he must not avoid fights, were instructed that it is wrong to fight when the fighting occurred within the home. The youngsters had become so inured to this kind of paradoxical message that they were able to report countless incidents of contradictory injunction, paradox and inconsistency without conscious awareness of the phenomena. For instance, Amy, whose father was seen as exhibiting repeated violent physical aggression against Amy and against Amy's mother, reported her mother as having told her that she, Amy, must not hit her brothers--that her mother will kill her if she does. Her father, who was repeatedly involved in physical altercations with the police as a result of his violent aggressive behavior at home and elsewhere, continually instructed Amy that "as the oldest in the family, she sets an example for the younger children," and therefore she is not to hit them. Amy recited these paradoxical communications from both her parents without conscious awareness, even as she articulated them in the group, of the intrinsic paradox in the messages.

This interactive sequence of events was experienced in only slightly varying degrees, by all of the youngsters in the group. As described earlier, the youngsters in this study presented many different features: there were white youngsters and black youngsters; children from broken homes and intact families; children raised with both natural parents, with a single parent, with one natural parent and a step-parent, and with adoptive parents; early maturers and late maturers. Family size ranged from an only child to a family of eleven children. Birth orders ranged from youngest to middle child to oldest; parental attitudes from very permissive to very restrictive. In some homes parents had alcohol



problems; in some neither drank at all. Some children were given spending money; some were not; some parents talked with their children; some did not. Some children reported their parents as getting along well; some, as not getting along at all. Some mothers worked, some did not; some families were on welfare; some had "good jobs." There were youngsters who were leaders and youngsters who were followers, and there were isolates. There was a broad spread of academic functioning from high to failing.

The one commonality that seems to unite these children--that appears as a common thread running through their experiences, cutting across variables that differentiate them--is that they are enmeshed (in differing configurations) in a vast interaction pattern of paradoxical and quasi-paradoxical communications, internal and external inconsistencies of demands and expectations, within and across situations and persons in authority in those situations. With fighting, with smoking, with "cussing out the teacher," with all of the behaviors for which they repeatedly find themselves in trouble: the only way to obey is to disobey. They are enmeshed in a complex no-win manifold and the data of their experience is unassimilable.

Mounting stress and potential disorganization are necessary concomitants of extensive experiences which cannot be assimilated by the individual (Epstein, 1973, 1975). The behaviors of these youngsters demonstrated the effects of considerable stress. They responded to the futility and the confusion of demands and expectations: with frustration, irritation, annoyance, hostility, anger, despair; with a desire to punish the perpetrators of this futility--those authority figures who, as they

perceived it, insisted on punishing them for inability to meet a complex of demands and expectations which cannot be met,

Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) distinguish between the contradictory injunction and the true paradoxical communication. Describing the effects of paradox in human interaction first described by Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland in 1956, they present a modified and expanded definition of their interpretation of the ingredients of a double bind. In their view, two or more persons must be involved in an intense relationship that has a high degree of physical and/or psychological survival value for one, several, or all of them. (Both the child/parents and the child/school fit this requirement.)

In such a context, a message is given which must be disobeyed to be obeyed, in the case of messages which are injunctions. In their discussions, the message which must be obeyed to be disobeyed is seen as having come from only one communicator. They do not discuss the interactive situation in which the person receiving the communication is in two parallel complementary relationships simultaneously, as is the case where a child must obey both parents and school authorities with regard to the same phenomena.

Even if one were to leave aside the double bind conceptualization, these youngsters can be seen to be deeply enmeshed in situations rife with contradictory injunctions. At the very least, the one avoidable impact of contradictory injunctions is that the recipient of these injunctions is caught in a no-win situation; he cannot avoid "getting into trouble" one way or the other. One can readily hypothesize that a result of not being able to see a way to avoid getting into trouble, repeatedly,

would be lower self-esteem.

We can hypothesize that these youngsters, who cannot assimilate the data of their experience, and who may be assumed to experience low self-esteem (another precursor to potential disorganization in Epstein's self-theory), experience mounting stress. As persons experiencing mounting stress, they can be presumed to react with increasing hostility to the system imposing demands upon them which they find themselves unable to meet. Whereas the school sees itself as a benign authority, and as responding to the unacceptable behavior of the youngsters, the youngsters, as the evidence amply demonstrates, perceive the inconsistent, unfair, unjust school authorities as the stimulus situation to which they are responding. In actuality, what appears to be occurring is that the school is responding to the youngsters' response to the school, while, simultaneously, the youngster is responding to the school's response to the youngster. Both subsystems appear caught in an endless--and vicious--feedback loop mechanism.

Whereas the school perceives its system as one responding identically to all youngsters, these youngsters see the school responding one way to "good kids" and a very different way to "troublemakers" (e.g., said Andrea, "If the other kid's good, and I'm a troublemaker, they'll never believe me"). The school authorities acknowledge only a unidirectional interpretation of this phenomenon: that the child's different behavior is the situation to which they, the adults, respond. But as Raush (1976) notes, in the interpersonal situation, each person is the situation for the other. In the perception of the troubled adolescents in our group, each of them unquestionably perceived the behavior of the parents, the

teachers, the vice principals, toward them as the situation to which their behavior is a response. Since the teachers and vice principals do not conceptualize their behavior as situation for the child's behavior, but as the response to the "bad" behavior the child, they impute the child's behaviors to personological variables within the child. They are confident that they are responding to a personal attribute in the individual child. The child is sure that he is responding to a situational attribute--the behavior toward him which he experiences in his transactions with the school personnel. The impasse lies in the fact that each is right, in his own way: as Raush points out (1976) in continuing relationships the attribution of events to either persons or situations is arbitrary. The adult responds to the child's response. In the next interactional sequence, the child responds to the adult's response to the child's response, ad infinitum.

The feedback loop system is a complex one as it relates to these youngsters, involving as it does the multifacted interactive phenomena affecting, and affected by, the subsystems of children, parents and school. The impact of these interactive phenomena appear to be closely tied to the disturbed behavior of these youngsters, as it evidences itself in their failure to achieve even minimal success at coping with their contemporary objective environment and its demands and expectations. In Horney's (1945) view, "a conflict that starts with our relations in others in time affects the whole personality. Human relationships are so crucial that they are bound to mold the qualities we develop, the goals we set for ourselves, the values we believe in. All these in turn react upon (emphases mine) our relations with others and



so are inextricably woven" (p. 46). Brim (1966) spells out a further assertion: ". . .where [an individual] is involved with persons who make conflicting and irresolvable role demands the concept of identity confusion permits one to move directly from the existence of conflict in the objective social order to its consequences for personality" (pp. 7-8).

As these authors, along with Trickett, Kelly and Todd (1972) and others, suggest, conflicting and unresolvable conditions in the contemporary objective environment of a person have profound effects on his physical and mental health. Trickett et al. suggest that the socialization process in the high school can become more relevant in improving the functioning of both the school and the people within it as ways are developed to understand and conceptualize individuals in terms of the interactions between the youngster and the school.

The near total involvement in school is a way of life that gives the school and the varied activities which take place within its boundaries great formative power (Trickett et al., 1972). The adult social system of the school with its powers to give information, distribute grades, influence curricular and life decisions, and to decide on suspension and recommendations are important aspects of what Trickett et al. call the socialization structure of the high school. As these authors suggest in their discussion of the research needs related to the social environment in the high school, it is important to consider the preventive potential of strengthening the ability of adolescents to cope with stress, of reducing "psychologically hazardous" conditions in the school and other settings, and of providing adequate opportunities for adolescents to resolve their crises situations in growth promoting ways. Our study

would seem to suggest that there do exist psychologically hazardous conditions within the school, and that these have significance for community mental health. The data also suggest, however, that perhaps an additional approach may be necessary if we are to envision a growth-promoting environment as an essential goal for all children.

Raush (1976) suggests that institutional changes--in schools and other settings--have often been vitiated by failure to induce or maintain required parallel changes in personal values and attitudes. In the view of Trickett et al. (1972), "the source for preventive interventions for the student and faculty of the high school will derive from a point of view that focuses directly upon the relationship between the individual student and the high school environment" (p. 333). The present study indicates a serious need for a conceptualization of a model for preventive intervention which would include dimensions related to the impact of family influences.

As Bronfenbrenner (1973) concluded in his landmark experimental study of comparative childhood development, what is called for is greater involvement of parents, and other adults, in the lives of American children, and--conversely--greater involvement of children in responsibility on behalf of their own family, community, and society at large. "Given the fragmented character of modern American life," wrote Bronfenbrenner (p. 170), "such an injunction may appear to some as a pipe dream. But it need not be."

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